

Official Report of the
One Hundred Seventy-sixth
Semiannual General

CONFERENCE

of The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

held in the Conference Center
Salt Lake City, Utah

September 30 and October 1, 2006

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Report of the 176th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The 176th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, September 30, 2006, at 10:00 a.m.

The general sessions of the conference were held at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, September 30 and October 1, 2006. The general priesthood session was held on Saturday, September 30, at 6:00 p.m.

President Gordon B. Hinckley presided at all sessions of the conference. He conducted the Sunday morning session. President Thomas S. Monson conducted the Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, general priesthood, and Sunday afternoon sessions.

The conference was carried by satellite transmission to thousands of Church buildings in many countries. In areas that did not receive this transmission, video recordings of the conference were sent to local distribution centers and made available to all Church units. In addition, television and radio stations carried portions or all of the general sessions to large audiences throughout North America. The proceedings were also broadcast live over the Internet.

General Authorities

First Presidency: Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, Henry B. Eyring, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and David A. Bednar

Presidency of the Seventy: Earl C. Tingey, D. Todd Christofferson, Charles

Didier, Merrill J. Bateman, Robert C. Oaks, Neil L. Andersen, and Ronald A. Rasband

First Quorum of the Seventy: Carlos H. Amado, David S. Baxter, Shayne M. Bowen, Monte J. Brough, Sheldon F. Child, L. Whitney Clayton, Gary J. Coleman, Spencer J. Condie, Gene R. Cook, Quentin L. Cook, Claudio R. M. Costa, Benjamín De Hoyos, Robert K. Dellenbach, John B. Dickson, David F. Evans, Christoffel Golden Jr., Walter F. González, C. Scott Grow, Bruce C. Hafen, Donald L. Hallstrom, Keith K. Hilbig, Richard G. Hinckley, Jay E. Jensen, Marlin K. Jensen, Daniel L. Johnson, Kenneth Johnson, Paul V. Johnson, W. Rolfe Kerr, Yoshihiko Kikuchi, Paul E. Koeliker, John M. Madsen, Richard J. Maynes, Lynn A. Mickelsen, Marcus B. Nash, Dennis B. Neuenschwander, Glenn L. Pace, Anthony D. Perkins, Paul B. Pieper, Bruce D. Porter, Carl B. Pratt, Lynn G. Robbins, Cecil O. Samuelson Jr., Steven E. Snow, Ulisses Soares, Francisco J. Viñas, Lance B. Wickman, and W. Craig Zwick

Second Quorum of the Seventy: Mervyn B. Arnold, Douglas L. Callister, Craig A. Cardon, Craig C. Christensen, Shirley D. Christensen, Don R. Clarke, James M. Dunn, Keith R. Edwards, Stanley G. Ellis, Daryl H. Garn, D. Rex Gerratt, Larry W. Gibbons, Spencer V. Jones, Won Yong Ko, Gerald N. Lund, Clate W. Mask Jr., Robert F. Orton, William W. Parmley, Wolfgang H. Paul, Wayne S. Peterson, R. Conrad Schultz, W. Douglas Shumway, Lowell M. Snow, Robert R. Steuer, Paul K. Sybrowsky, William R. Walker, Robert S. Wood, and H. Ross Workman

Presiding Bishopric: H. David Burton, Richard C. Edgley, and Keith B. McMullin

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 176th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, September 30, 2006. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Richard Elliott and John Longhurst were the organists. To begin this session, the choir sang “Arise, O God, and Shine.” President Monson then made the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you to the first general session of the 176th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We acknowledge the General Authorities seated on the stand in the Conference Center and Assembly Hall and likewise acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies in attendance at this conference.

We extend a special welcome to government, education, and civic leaders who are present with us.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many television and radio stations and satellite and cable systems for offering their facilities as a public service to bring this conference to a large audience in many parts of the world. We are also pleased to make available these proceedings via the Church’s official Internet site.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Richard Elliott and John Longhurst at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing “Arise, O God, and Shine” and will now favor us with “We Ever Pray for Thee.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Merrill J. Bateman of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir sang “We Ever Pray for Thee.”

Elder Merrill J. Bateman offered the invocation.

President Monson

We shall now hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet. Following President Hinckley’s remarks, the choir will sing “Each Life That Touches Ours for Good.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Continued growth of the Church

My brothers and sisters, as we gather in another general conference, I am pleased to report that the Church continues to grow in strength and influence. In 1982, some 24 years ago, I noted this in

my journal: “There will be in place for the October general conference more than 300 downlinks in our satellite service. This means that we will have more than 300 stake centers where our people may gather across the nation and participate in the conference.”

I am now advised that there are 6,066 Church-owned satellite receiving sites in 83 countries. How grateful I am that with our growth in numbers there is also an increased ability to reach out and communicate with the Latter-day Saints throughout the world.

Now, we could wish for more baptisms in the United States and Canada, but that could be said of everywhere throughout the world. Nevertheless, the harvest is great, with members in some 160 nations. Where not long ago there were very few Latter-day Saints, today there are strong wards and stakes, with faithful and capable men and women in leadership.

Though there are limitations on our ability to travel where we might, there is compensation in the ability of the First Presidency, members of the Twelve, and the Seventy to speak by satellite to large numbers of stakes throughout the world.

Circumstances change, but our message does not change. We bear testimony to the world that the heavens have been opened, that God, our Eternal Father, and His Son, the risen Lord, have appeared and spoken. We offer our solemn witness that the priesthood has been restored with the keys and authority of eternal blessings.

New temples and other building projects

We recently dedicated the new Sacramento California Temple, the 7th in that state and the 123rd in the world. We also broke ground for another temple in the Salt Lake area.

We are pleased to announce that the renovation of the Salt Lake Tabernacle is proceeding on schedule and that this unique and wonderful facility will next spring again accommodate the Tabernacle Choir in its weekly broadcasts.

The Church is undertaking a huge development project in the interest of protecting the environment of Temple Square. While the costs will be great, it will not involve the expenditure of tithing funds.

However, the faithfulness of our people continues to be demonstrated in the payment of tithes and offerings.

Altogether, I can only report that the Lord is richly blessing His Church, and our duty is to do all we can to move it forward.

Now, brothers and sisters, after the singing of the choir, we shall hear the remarks of our brethren and sisters. And as we proceed with this great conference, may the Spirit of the Lord dictate all that is done and said, and may our hearts and minds be filled to overflowing is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Each Life That Touches Ours for Good."

President Monson

We will now be pleased to hear from Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, after which we shall hear from Elders Richard H. Winkel and Paul B. Pieper of the Seventy. Following their remarks, the choir and congregation will sing "Redeemer of Israel."

At the conclusion of the singing, Elder David S. Baxter of the Seventy will address us, after which we shall hear from Elder Robert C. Oaks of the Presidency of the Seventy. He will be followed by Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The choir will then sing "Love at Home."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Many are heavy laden

The Savior said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Many carry heavy burdens. Some have lost a loved one to death or care for one who is disabled. Some have been wounded by divorce. Others yearn for an eternal marriage. Some are caught in the grip of addictive substances or practices like alcohol, tobacco, drugs, or pornography. Others have crippling physical or mental impairments. Some are challenged by same-gender attraction. Some have terrible feelings of depression or inadequacy. In one way or another, many are heavy laden.

To each of us our Savior gives this loving invitation:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

Jesus healed every kind of affliction

The scriptures contain many accounts of the Savior’s healing the heavy laden. He caused the blind to see; the deaf to hear; the palsied, withered, or maimed to be restored; lepers to be cleansed; and unclean spirits to be cast out. Often we read that the person healed of these physical ailments was “made whole” (see Matthew 14:36; 15:28; Mark 6:56; 10:52; Luke 17:19; John 5:9).

Jesus healed many from physical diseases, but He did not withhold healing from those who sought to be “made whole” from other ailments. Matthew writes that He healed every sickness and every disease among the people (see

Matthew 4:23; 9:35). Great multitudes followed Him, and He “healed them all” (Matthew 12:15). Surely these healings included those whose sicknesses were emotional, mental, or spiritual. He healed them all.

In His early sermon in the synagogue, Jesus read aloud from this prophecy of Isaiah: “He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). As Jesus declared that He was come to fulfill that prophecy, He expressly affirmed that He would heal those with physical ailments and He would also deliver the captive, liberate the bruised, and heal the brokenhearted.

The Gospel of Luke contains many examples of that ministry. It tells of the time when “great multitudes came together to hear [Jesus], and to be healed by him of their infirmities” (Luke 5:15). On other occasions it records that Jesus “cured many of their infirmities” (Luke 7:21) and that He “healed them that had need of healing” (Luke 9:11). It also describes how a great multitude of people out of Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Sidon came down to the plain “to hear him, and to be healed” (Luke 6:17).

When the Savior appeared to the righteous in the New World, He called for persons to come forward who were lame or blind or had other physical ailments. He extended the same invitation to those “that are afflicted in any manner” (3 Nephi 17:7). “Bring them hither,” He said, “and I will heal them” (v. 7). The Book of Mormon tells how the multitude brought forward “all them that were afflicted in any manner” (v. 9). This must have included persons with every kind of physical or emotional or mental affliction,

and the scripture testifies that Jesus “did heal them every one” (v. 9).

Healing power of the Atonement

The Savior teaches that we will have tribulation in the world, but we should “be of good cheer” because He has “overcome the world” (John 16:33). His Atonement reaches and is powerful enough not only to pay the price for sin but also to heal every mortal affliction. The Book of Mormon teaches that “he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the world might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11; see also 2 Nephi 9:21).

He knows of our anguish, and He is there for us. Like the good Samaritan in His parable, when He finds us wounded at the wayside, He binds up our wounds and cares for us (see Luke 10:34). Brothers and sisters, the healing power of His Atonement is for you, for us, for all.

His all-encompassing healing power is sought in the prayerful words of our hymn “Master, the Tempest Is Raging”:

Master, with anguish of spirit
I bow in my grief today.
The depths of my sad heart are
troubled.
Oh, waken and save, I pray!
Torrents of sin and of anguish
Sweep o’er my sinking soul,
And I perish! I perish! dear Master.
Oh, hasten and take control!
[Hymns, no. 105]

Healings through priesthood authority

We can be healed through the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Jesus gave His Apostles power “to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Matthew 10:1; see also Mark 3:15; Luke 9:1–2), and they went forth “preaching the gospel, and healing every where”

(Luke 9:6; see also Mark 6:13; Acts 5:16). The Seventy were also sent forth with power and direction to heal the sick (see Luke 10:9; Acts 8:6–7).

Although the Savior could heal all whom He would heal, this is not true of those who hold His priesthood authority. Mortal exercises of that authority are limited by the will of Him whose priesthood it is. Consequently, we are told that some whom the elders bless are not healed because they are “appointed unto death” (D&C 42:48). Similarly, when the Apostle Paul sought to be healed from the “thorn in the flesh” that buffeted him (2 Corinthians 12:7), the Lord declined to heal him. Paul later wrote that the Lord explained, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9). Paul obediently responded that he would “rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong” (vv. 9–10).

Blessings suited to individual needs

Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a “healing” cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are “healed” by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us.

The people who followed Alma were in bondage to wicked oppressors. When they prayed for relief, the Lord told them He would deliver them eventually, but in the meantime He would ease their burdens “that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses . . . that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions” (Mosiah 24:14). In that case the people did not have their burdens removed, but the Lord strengthened them so that “they could bear up their burdens

with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord" (v. 15).

This same promise and effect applies to you mothers who are widowed or divorced, to you singles who are lonely, to you caregivers who are burdened, to you persons who are addicted, and to all of us whatever our burden. "Come unto Christ," the prophet says, "and be perfected in him" (Moroni 10:32).

At times we may despair that our burdens are too great. When it seems that a tempest is raging in our lives, we may feel abandoned and cry out like the disciples in the storm, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38). At such times we should remember His reply: "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (v. 40).

The healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ—whether it removes our burdens or strengthens us to endure and live with them like the Apostle Paul—is available for every affliction in mortality.

Overcoming pornography

After I gave a general conference talk on the evils of pornography (see Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 91–95; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 87–90), I received many letters from persons burdened with this addiction. Some of these letters were from men who had overcome pornography. One man wrote:

"There are several lessons I've gleaned from my experience coming out of the darkness of a sin that so thoroughly dominates the lives of the people it ensnares: (1) This is a major problem that is unbelievably difficult to overcome. . . . (2) The most important source of support and strength in the repentance process is the Savior. . . . (3) Intense, daily scripture study, regular temple worship, and serious, contemplative participation in the ordinance of the sacrament are all indispensable parts of a true repentance process. This, I assume, is

because all of these activities serve to deepen and strengthen one's relationship with the Savior, one's understanding of His atoning sacrifice, and one's faith in His healing power" (letter dated Oct. 24, 2005).

"Come unto me," the Savior said, "and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28–29). That heavy-laden man turned to the Savior, and so can each of us.

A woman whose marriage was threatened by her husband's addiction to pornography wrote how she stood beside him for five pain-filled years until, as she said, "through the gift of our precious Savior's glorious Atonement and what He taught me about forgiveness, [my husband] finally is free—and so am I." As one who needed no cleansing from sin, but only sought a loved one's deliverance from captivity, she wrote this advice:

"Commune with the Lord. . . . He is your best friend! He knows your pain because He has felt it for you already. He is ready to carry that burden. Trust Him enough to place it at His feet and allow Him to carry it for you. Then you can have your anguish replaced with His peace, in the very depths of your soul" (letter dated Apr. 18, 2005).

Man dealing with same-gender attraction

A man wrote a General Authority about how the power of the Atonement helped him with his problem of same-gender attraction. He had been excommunicated for serious transgressions that violated his temple covenants and his responsibilities to his children. He had to choose whether to attempt to live the gospel or whether to continue a course contrary to its teachings.

"I knew it would be difficult," he wrote, "but I didn't realize what I would have to go through." His letter describes the emptiness and loneliness and the incredible pain he experienced from deep

within his soul as he sought to return. He prayed mightily for forgiveness, sometimes for hours at a time. He was sustained by reading the scriptures, by the companionship of a loving bishop, and by priesthood blessings. But what finally made the difference was the help of the Savior. He explained:

“It [was] only through Him and His Atonement. . . . I now feel an overwhelming gratitude. My pains have been almost more than I could bear at times, and yet they were so small compared to what He suffered. Where there once was darkness in my life, there is now love and gratitude.”

He continues: “Some profess that change is possible and therapy is the only answer. They are very learned on the subject and have so much to offer those who struggle . . . , but I worry that they forget to involve Heavenly Father in the process. If change is to happen, it will happen according to the will of God. I also worry that many people focus on the causes of [same-gender attraction]. . . . There is no need to determine why I have [this challenge]. I don’t know if I was born with it, or if environmental factors contributed to it. The fact of the matter is that I have this struggle in my life and what I do with it from this point forward is what matters” (letter dated Mar. 25, 2006).

Atonement gives strength to endure

The persons who wrote these letters know that the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the healing it offers do much more than provide the opportunity for repentance from sins. The Atonement also gives us the strength to endure “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind,” because our Savior also took upon Him “the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11). Brothers and sisters, if your faith and prayers and the power of the priesthood do not heal you from an affliction, the power of the Atonement will surely give you the strength to bear the burden.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” the Savior said, “and I will give you rest . . . unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29).

As we struggle with the challenges of mortality, I pray for each of us, as the prophet Mormon prayed for his son, Moroni: “May Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, . . . and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Moroni 9:25).

I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who invites us all to come unto Him and be perfected in Him. He will bind up our wounds and He will heal the heavy laden. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Richard H. Winkel

Temples are about families

As President Hinckley just mentioned, the 123rd temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was recently dedicated by President Hinckley in Sacramento, California. This beautiful temple serves more than 80,000 wonderful and excited members of the Church in Sacramento and surrounding areas. Over

168,000 visitors toured the temple during the open house. They were told that members can draw closer to the Savior Jesus Christ in these magnificent edifices than anywhere else in the world. Our members know that through Him they can find the peace and hope that will sustain them and their families in today’s troubled world.

When you come to the temple you will love your family with a deeper love

than you have ever felt before. The temple is about families. As my wife, Karen, and I have increased our temple service, our love for each other and for our children has increased. And it doesn't stop there. It extends to parents, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, forebears, and especially our grandchildren! This is the Spirit of Elijah, which is the spirit of family history work; and when inspired by the Holy Ghost, it prompts the turning of the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers. Because of the priesthood, husbands and wives are sealed together and children are sealed to their parents for eternity, so the family is eternal and will not be separated at death.

A father-and-son bowling activity

When my wife and I were young parents with little children at home, we challenged our children to memorize the Articles of Faith. The prize, or reward, for completing them was a night out with Dad. We were pleased that our three oldest completed the challenge. When our seven-year-old son first memorized all 13 Articles of Faith, we sat down to pick out a night and activity that we could do together. I was so busy with work, social activities, and Church responsibilities that I couldn't give my son a night out for about two weeks. He was sorely disappointed. However, I found that in the city where we lived there was an all-night bowling alley. We immediately picked a date and chose to start our activity at 5:00 in the morning. Our plan was to get up at 4:00, have breakfast, and then go downtown.

When that day arrived, I felt someone shaking my shoulder very early in the morning. As I tried to open my eyes I heard my son say, "Is it time, Dad?" I looked at my alarm clock; it was only 2:00 a.m.!

"Go to sleep, Son," I said. "It's not time yet."

An hour later the same thing happened. "Dad, Dad, is it time to go?" After sending him to bed for a second time, I couldn't help but feel his excitement.

Then at 4:00 a.m. we got up, had something to eat, and left for the bowling alley. We had a wonderful time.

I wish I could say I had *regular* and memorable activities like that with all my children, but I can't. I'm one of those parents who oftentimes wishes he could go back and do some things over.

Blessings of temple sealings

Like you, I don't want to lose any of my children. I want to be together forever with all of my family. The temple gives all of us extra hope of continuing and improving these relationships, even after this life. Sealings bestowed in the temple promise additional blessings.

"The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain."¹

Isn't this statement encouraging news for parents whose children are sealed to them?

Additional blessings of the temple

Let's look at a few other blessings the temple brings. The house of the Lord is a refuge from the world. The Sacramento members shared the following comment with their open house guests: "Sometimes our minds are so beset with problems, and there are so many things clamoring for [our] attention at once that we just cannot think clearly. . . . At the temple the dust of distraction seems to settle out, the fog and the haze seem to lift, and we can 'see' things that we were not able to see before."²

The celestial room in the temple is especially a place of peace, tranquillity, and beauty. It is a quiet haven where one can reflect, ponder, pray, meditate, and feel the love of Heavenly Father and the Savior. As we ponder and meditate in the temple, our thoughts naturally focus on members of our family.

In 2 Samuel 22:7 we read the words of David: "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears." The temple is a place of personal revelation that will bless us in our stewardships.

President Hinckley has told us that "just as our Redeemer gave His life as a vicarious sacrifice for all men, and in so doing became our Savior, even so we, in a small measure, when we engage in proxy work in the temple, become as saviors to

those on the other side who have no means of advancing unless something is done in their behalf by those on earth."³

This is such meaningful service we give because our departed brothers and sisters literally become more connected to us.

The temple is a place to know the Father and the Son. It is a place where we experience the divine presence. The Prophet Joseph Smith made this plea: "I advise all to . . . search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness."⁴ And where shall we search? In the house of God.

Let's become a temple-attending and temple-loving people. I bear testimony that the temple is about families. I also testify that everything in the temple testifies of Jesus Christ. His example of love and service is felt there. The temple is His holy house. I know that He is the Son of God, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Mediator, and our Advocate with the Father. He loves us and wants our families to be happy and to be together forever. He wants all of us to be active in His temple.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110.
2. Boyd K. Packer, "The Holy Temple," *Ensign*, Feb. 1995, 36.
3. *Discourses of President Gordon B. Hinckley, Volume 2: 2000–2004* (2005), 265.
4. *History of the Church*, 6:363.

Elder Paul B. Pieper

Several days ago, we were discussing talks during a family meal. Clarissa, our 13-year-old daughter, was preparing a sacrament meeting talk for our branch in Moscow and felt some anxiety. I reassured her that all would be well and released a little anxiety of my own by saying that at

least she didn't have to speak in front of thousands of people in general conference. Clarissa gave me some advice of her own: "It will be OK, Dad. Just pretend it's a big branch." Brothers and sisters, you are indeed a very large branch.

A message for first-generation members

I have chosen to address my remarks this morning to first-generation members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You are those who are the first in your family to hear and embrace the message that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth in our day with living prophets, seers, and revelators. You humbled yourselves, exercised faith, and repented of all your sins, taking upon you the name of Jesus Christ through baptism by immersion, and received the Holy Ghost.¹ By being the first in your family to accept the gospel, you become the first generation, a chosen generation through which generations past, present, and future may be blessed.²

Being a first-generation member of the Church is not always easy. You will walk where no one in your family has walked before. Conditions around you may be challenging. You may have few, or no, friends or relatives to understand and support you. At times you may become discouraged, wondering if it is all worth it. My purpose this morning is to assure you that it is.

Serving in the Church

First-generation members occupy a special and important place in the Church and their families. Did you know that first-generation members constitute more than half of the membership of the Church?³ Perhaps not since the early days of the Church has the first generation constituted such a large percentage of total Church membership as it does today. Your faith and testimonies are a great strength and blessing to others. Through you, we gain a deeper understanding of gospel principles and our testimonies are strengthened.

You add great strength to the Church when you use your testimony, talents,

abilities, and energy to build the kingdom in your wards and branches. You are great examples of sharing the gospel, serving missions, sending children on missions, and welcoming new members. You reach out in kindness to those around you, lifting and blessing them through inspired service. So much of what is done in the Church today could not be done without your efforts.

Influencing and serving family members

More importantly, as a first-generation member, you occupy an important place in your family. You are an example to your family of a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Whether they are members of the Church or not, as you live the gospel at home, those around you will feel the Savior's love through you. They know that you are engaged in something good, even if they do not understand it or have enough faith to accept it. Be patient and kind, pray each day to know how you can serve them, and the Lord will help you and bless you to influence your family for good. By being consistently good and upright, you will establish patterns of faithfulness and righteousness. Those patterns will shape your life, but more importantly, they will become a standard for your family and posterity.

As the first generation, you are also the key to opening the Lord's blessings to family members who died without hearing the gospel and receiving saving ordinances. Yours is the unique opportunity and privilege to begin this work on their behalf. They are anxious for you to identify them and will help you in your search for their records. Once they are identified, your worthy life will permit you to attend the temple and perform essential ordinances for them. These ordinances will bind you to your ancestors and bring great spiritual power into your life.

Importance of small decisions

Because you are a first-generation member, each choice you make is important. Seemingly small, insignificant decisions will impact past and future generations, as well as your own life. One young first-generation member, Chris, was offered a drink of alcohol at work the day after his baptism. His friends were all there and were drinking. There was considerable pressure. No one else knew that the day before, he had been baptized and made promises to the Lord. He made the decision not to drink and was treated poorly. Reflecting on that event later, he wrote: "It is now forty years since I made those [baptismal] promises and I can truthfully say that I have . . . kept the Word of Wisdom. . . . I believe if I had accepted [that] drink that I would, perhaps, never have been able to keep the Word of Wisdom."⁴

But Chris kept his baptismal promises. Later he met and married a faithful member. Together they raised eight children in the gospel. Now in the sixth generation, his faithful descendants number in the hundreds. Dozens have served missions and introduced the gospel to others. His efforts in family history opened the blessings of the gospel to hundreds more. One small decision by a first-generation member made a difference for thousands.

Can you see now why the first generation is so important? Can you understand the position you occupy and the influence you can have for good? Please never underestimate who you are and the power that you have to affect others. Satan understands who you are and will do all possible to entice you to make wrong choices. At times, despite our best efforts, we all make mistakes. Fortunately, Heavenly Father has prepared a way for us to overcome them through repentance and reliance on the Atonement of His Son. Do

not be discouraged if you make a mistake. Repenting and continuing to press forward are perhaps the most important patterns to develop in the first generation. Be patient and move forward in obedience.

Pioneer legacy

In the Church we read and speak much about pioneers in early Church history. They were first-generation members just like you. They lived each day meeting the challenges of family, work, and faith. They lived good, ordinary lives and were faithful, serving in the Church and blessing their families. When they fell down, they got back up and moved on. Now those of us who are their descendants look back with reverence and gratitude for their faithfulness.

Their legacy can be yours as fellow members of the first generation. Be faithful, serve your fellowman, bless your family, and make proper choices. You are the first generation, a chosen generation to bless past, present, and future generations. We honor you. Past and future generations will honor you. But most importantly, God will honor you for being faithful in the first generation. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Articles of Faith 1:4; Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
2. See 1 Peter 2:9.
3. According to the Church's Member and Statistical Records Division, first-generation members made up 64 percent of total Church membership as of July 2006.
4. *History of Heinrich Friedrich Christian Pieper and Emma Frieda Alber and Their Family* (1987), 29.

The choir and congregation sang
"Redeemer of Israel."

Elder David S. Baxter

Gospel journey

Thirty-nine years ago two of the Lord's missionaries knocked on my family's door in Glasgow, Scotland. We were deeply touched by their brightness, their humility, and their faith. Whenever they were in our home, we felt love and peace. It was a feeling of sheer goodness.

Their teaching was personal, sincere, familiar. We simply felt that it was true. A few weeks later we were baptized and confirmed and were immediately embraced with friendship and kindness from members and leaders in our new Church family.

So began a gospel journey which has enriched and blessed every aspect of our lives, bringing a deep, abiding, calming sense of purpose and direction. In the hope that it may prove helpful to those new to Church membership, I will share today just three gospel fundamentals learned along the way.

Faith in Jesus Christ

First is the motivating, transforming power of faith in Jesus Christ. Such faith is like spiritual oxygen. As we allow faith to freely flow within us, it awakens and enlivens our spiritual senses. It breathes life into our very souls.

As faith flows, we become sensitively attuned to the whisperings of the Spirit. Our minds are enlightened, our spiritual pulse quickens, our hearts are touched.

Faith fuels hope. Our perspective changes; our vision becomes clearer. We begin to look for the best, not the worst, in life and in others. We gain a deeper sense of life's purpose and meaning. Despair gives way to joy.

Faith such as this is a heavenly gift, but it can be sought and cultivated. As our Bible Dictionary suggests, often "faith is kindled by hearing the testimony of those

who have faith."¹ Faith is then nurtured as we allow ourselves to believe. Like all other virtues, faith is strengthened as we practice it, as we live and act as if our faith were already deep. Faith is the product of righteous desire, belief, and obedience.

Thus the Book of Mormon example of the father of King Lamoni, who heard the testimony of Aaron and was willing to believe and to act so that he was led to say in humble prayer, "If there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee."²

So it can be for us as we allow ourselves to be touched by the spirit of testimony, as we exercise belief, as we desire, ponder, seek—as we cultivate our faith.

Growth through service

Second, as we serve we grow. President George Albert Smith taught, "It is not what we receive that enriches our lives, it is what we give."³

Selfless service is a wonderful antidote to the ills that flow from the worldwide epidemic of self-indulgence. Some grow bitter or anxious when it seems that not enough attention is being paid to them, when their lives would be so enriched if only they paid more attention to the needs of others.

The answer lies in helping to solve the problems of those around us rather than worrying about our own, living to lift burdens even when we ourselves feel weighed down, putting our shoulder to the wheel instead of complaining that the wagons of life seem to be passing us by.

Stretching our souls in service helps us to rise above our cares, concerns, and challenges. As we focus our energies on lifting the burdens of others, something miraculous happens. Our own burdens diminish. We become happier. There is more substance to our lives.

Staying steadfast, constant, and true

Third, discipleship does not guarantee freedom from the storms of life. Even as we are wending our way carefully and faithfully along the strait and narrow path, we encounter obstacle and challenge. There are days, perhaps even months and years, when life is just hard. We experience our fair share of adversity, heartache, loneliness, pain, grief—sometimes, it seems, more than our fair share.

What to do when adversity strikes? There is only one thing to do. Stand steady and see it through. Stay steadfast, constant, and true. The real tragedy in the whirlwinds of life comes only when we allow them to blow us off our true course.

At these moments of crisis and challenge, some choose to abandon faith just at the time when it most needs to be embraced. Prayer is ignored at the very hour when it needs to be intensified. Virtue is carelessly tossed aside when it needs to be cherished. God is forsaken in the all-too-human yet mistaken fear that He has forsaken us.

The truth is that our only safety, our only security, our only hope is to hold fast to that which is good. As the mists of darkness gather around us, we are only lost if we choose to let go of the iron rod, which is the word of God.

The Savior's parable of the wise man who built his house upon a rock has power precisely because it illustrates that life's challenges befell the wise man too. The rains fell, the winds blew, the floods rose up. Yet he survived it all because he had built upon a sure foundation and, crucially, he stayed there when the storm came.

In his description of a pilgrim's, or disciple's, progress, John Bunyan wrote:

Who would true valour see,
Let him come hither!

One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather;
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.⁴

The Apostle Paul urged the Colossians to "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard."⁵

To the people of Corinth came this powerful testimony:

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

"Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."⁶

What made such a perspective possible? Paul gave the reason: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."⁷

It is my witness that as we cultivate our faith, grow through service, and stay constant and true come what may, so we feel the Savior's love. We place ourselves in the position where we can access the breadth and depth of the blessings of the Atonement. Our membership is transformed into discipleship. We are strengthened, cleansed, refreshed, spiritually and emotionally healed.

Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Bible Dictionary, "Faith," 669.
2. Alma 22:18.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1935, 46.
4. *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1997), 295.
5. Colossians 1:23.
6. 2 Corinthians 4:8–9.
7. 2 Corinthians 4:6.

Elder Robert C. Oaks

Patience and charity

How thankful I am for latter-day scriptures regarding core Christian virtues.

The Book of Mormon provides insight into the relationship between patience and charity. Mormon, after pointing out that if a man “have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity,” goes on to name the 13 elements of charity, or the pure love of Christ. I find it most interesting that 4 of the 13 elements of this must-have virtue relate to patience (see Moroni 7:44–45).

First, “charity suffereth long.” That is what patience is all about. Charity “is not easily provoked” is another aspect of this quality, as is charity “beareth all things.” And finally, charity “endureth all things” is certainly an expression of patience (Moroni 7:45). From these defining elements it is evident that without patience gracing our soul, we would be seriously lacking with respect to a Christlike character.

Scriptural examples of patience

In the Bible, Job offers the classic portrait of patience. In the face of losing his vast empire, including his children, Job was able, because of his unfailing faith, to proclaim, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Through all of his tribulation and pain, “Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job 1:21–22).

How often do we hear oppressed souls ask foolishly, “How could God do this to me?” when really they should be praying for strength to bear and endure all things?

The greatest scriptural examples of patience are found in the life of Jesus Christ. His long-suffering and endurance are best demonstrated on that excruciating night in Gethsemane as He uttered, in

His atoning agony, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). He truly suffered and bore and endured all things.

While nailed to the cross on Calvary, Christ continued in His perfect example of patience as He uttered the singular words, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

These examples of patience have greater meaning for us when we consider the admonition found in 3 Nephi: “Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

Importance of patience

Several scriptures highlight the importance of patience. Let me mention a few:

“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19).

“Nevertheless the Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith” (Mosiah 23:21).

In Mosiah, King Benjamin instructs us that we will be a natural-man enemy of God until we yield to the enticings of the Holy Ghost through our patience, plus other virtues (see Mosiah 3:19).

Joseph Smith stated, “Patience is heavenly” (*History of the Church*, 6:427).

Is patience important and worthy of our pondering and pursuit? It certainly is if we would avoid the demeaning classification of “nothing” used to label those without charity. It is if we desire to be less a natural-man enemy of God. It is if we would be heavenly. It is if we would seek to become after the manner of Christ.

The impatient, natural man is all about us. We see it manifest in news reports of parents, in a fit of rage, abusing a child, even unto death. On our highways, incidents of mobile impatience, or road

rage, result in violent accidents and sometimes fatalities.

On a less dramatic but much more common level are flared tempers and harsh words uttered in response to slow-moving customer lines, never-ending telephone solicitation calls, or children reluctant to respond to our instructions. Do any of these sound familiar?

A father's patience with his son

Fortunately, there are seldom-reported but marvelous-to-consider stories of great patience. Recently I attended the funeral of a lifelong friend. His son told a beautiful story of parental patience. When the son was in his youth, his dad owned a motorcycle dealership. One day they received a shipment of shiny new motorcycles, and they lined them all up in the store. The boy did what every boy would like to do, and he climbed up on the closest one. He even started it up. Then, when he figured he had pushed his luck far enough, he jumped off. To his dismay, his dismount knocked the first bike down. Then, like a string of dominoes, they all went down, one after another. His dad heard the commotion and looked out from behind the partition where he was working. Slowly, smiling, he said, "Well, Son, we had better fix one up and sell it, so we can pay for the rest of them."

I think my friend's response personifies parental patience.

Patience as a gateway virtue

Patience may well be thought of as a gateway virtue, contributing to the growth and strength of its fellow virtues of forgiveness, tolerance, and faith. When Peter asked Christ how many times he should forgive his brother, Christ replied, "Seventy times seven," rather than the mere seven times that Peter had offered (see Matthew 18:21–22). To forgive seventy times seven certainly takes a large measure of patience.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell linked patience and faith together when he taught: "Patience is tied very closely to faith in our Heavenly Father. Actually, when we are unduly impatient, we are suggesting that we know what is best—better than does God. Or, at least, we are asserting that our timetable is better than his" ("Patience," *Ensign*, Oct. 1980, 28).

We can grow in faith only if we are willing to wait patiently for God's purposes and patterns to unfold in our lives, on His timetable.

Developing the virtue of patience

Since impatience is so natural, how do we develop the divine virtue of patience? How do we move our behavior from that of the natural man to that of our patient, perfect example, Jesus Christ?

First, we must understand that to do so is necessary, if we desire to fully enjoy the blessings of the restored gospel. Such an understanding might motivate us to:

1. Read each of the scriptures in the Topical Guide listed under the topic "patience" and then ponder Christ's patient examples.

2. Evaluate ourselves to determine where we stand on the patience continuum. How much more patience do we need to become more Christlike? This self-assessment is difficult. We might ask our spouse or another family member to help us.

3. Become sensitive to the examples of patience and of impatience that occur around us every day. We should strive to emulate those individuals we consider to be patient.

4. Recommit each day to become more patient, and be certain to keep our selected family member involved in our patience project.

This sounds like a great deal of work, but to achieve any worthwhile goal requires hard work. And overcoming the natural man and working to become more

Christlike in our patience is a most appropriate objective. I pray that we will pursue this path with diligence and dedication.

I testify that Jesus is the Christ and that He stands at the head of this Church,

guiding us through a living prophet and blessing our every effort to become more Christlike. And I so testify in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

“O be wise”

Brothers and sisters, while I was studying the Book of Mormon recently, one of the teachings of the prophet Jacob caught my attention. As you remember, Jacob was one of Father Lehi’s two sons born in the wilderness after the family left Jerusalem. He was an eyewitness to miracles, and he also watched as his family was torn apart by disobedience and rebellion. Jacob knew and loved Laman and Lemuel as he knew and loved Nephi, and the dissension between them was intimate and personal. As far as Jacob was concerned, it wasn’t about ideology, philosophy, or even theology. It was about family.

The tender anguish of Jacob’s soul is evident as he expresses grave concern that his people will “reject the words of the prophets” concerning Christ and “deny . . . the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, . . . and make a mock of the great plan of redemption” (Jacob 6:8).

And then, just before he bids farewell, he speaks eight simple words that are the basic text of my message this morning. Jacob’s plea was “O be wise; what can I say more?” (Jacob 6:12).

Those of you who are parents and grandparents have a sense of what Jacob must have been feeling at the time. He loved his people, partly because they were also his family. He had taught them as clearly as he could and with all the energy of his soul. He warned them in no uncertain terms what would happen if they chose not to “enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow”

(Jacob 6:11). He couldn’t think of anything else to say to warn, to urge, to inspire, to motivate. And so he simply and profoundly said, “O be wise; what can I say more?”

The need for wisdom in Church service

I have met with members of the Church in many nations of the world. I’m impressed with the spirit and energy of so many of our members. Hearts are being touched and lives are being blessed. The work is moving forward in dynamic ways, and for that I am profoundly grateful. But I see many ways that Church members must be so very wise in all that we do.

The Lord in His infinite wisdom has designed His Church to operate with a lay ministry. That means we have been charged to watch over one another and to serve one another. We are to love one another as our Father in Heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ love us. Our callings and circumstances change from time to time, providing us with different and unique opportunities to serve and to grow. Most of the leaders and teachers in the Church are anxiously engaged in fulfilling their responsibilities. Some are less effective than others—it is true; but almost always there is sincere effort to provide meaningful gospel service.

Occasionally we find some who become so energetic in their Church service that their lives become unbalanced. They start believing that the programs they administer are more important than the people they serve. They complicate their

service with needless frills and embellishments that occupy too much time, cost too much money, and sap too much energy. They refuse to delegate or to allow others to grow in their respective responsibilities.

As a result of their focusing too much time and energy on their Church service, eternal family relationships can deteriorate. Employment performance can suffer. This is not healthy, spiritually or otherwise. While there may be times when our Church callings require more intense effort and unusual focus, we need to strive to keep things in proper balance. We should never allow our service to replace the attention needed by other important priorities in our lives. Remember King Benjamin's counsel: "And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength" (Mosiah 4:27).

May I suggest six ways in which we can serve both wisely and well?

Focus on people, not programs

First, focus on people and principles—not on programs. One of the most important things we do through the gospel of Jesus Christ is to build people. Properly serving others requires effort to understand them as individuals—their personalities, their strengths, their concerns, their hopes and dreams—so that the correct help and support can be provided. Frankly, it's much easier to just manage programs than it is to understand and truly serve people. The primary purpose of Church leadership meetings should be to discuss how to minister to people. Most routine information and coordination can now be handled through phone calls, e-mails, or regular mail so that agendas for council meetings and presidency meetings can focus on needs of the people.

Our goal should always be to use the programs of the Church as a means to lift,

encourage, assist, teach, love, and perfect people. "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (D&C 18:10). Programs are tools. Their management and staffing must not take priority over the needs of the people they are designed to bless and to serve.

Be innovative

Second, be innovative. As we work to magnify our callings, we should seek the inspiration of the Spirit to solve problems in ways that will best help the people we serve. We have handbooks of instruction, and their guidelines should be followed. But within that framework are substantial opportunities to think, to be creative, and to make use of individual talents. The instruction to magnify our callings is not a command to embellish and complicate them. To innovate does not necessarily mean to expand; very often it means to simplify.

Because the eternal principle of agency gives us the freedom to choose and think for ourselves, we should become increasingly able to solve problems. We may make the occasional mistake, but as long as we are following gospel principles and guidelines, we can learn from those mistakes and become more understanding of others and more effective in serving them.

Being innovative also means that we do not have to be told everything we should do. The Lord said, "It is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant" (D&C 58:26). We trust you, brothers and sisters, to use inspiration. We trust that you will do so within the framework of Church policies and principles. We trust that you will be wise in counseling together to help build faith and testimony in the lives of those whom you serve.

Delegate responsibility

Third, divide the work and delegate responsibility. There is a difference between being responsible for getting the work done and doing the work yourself. For example, gone should be the days when the elders quorum president feels he needs to personally finish the home teaching visits that others have missed. The same is true for Relief Society presidents with respect to visiting teaching. Not only is this unwise; it isn't home or visiting teaching. Home teaching isn't about numbers or reporting visits to a home; visits and numbers are just a measuring stick. Home teaching is about love of people and service to and watchcare over our Heavenly Father's children.

Assignments should be made, responsibilities should be delegated, and members should be allowed to fulfill their stewardship as best they can. Counsel, advise, persuade, motivate—but don't do the work for them. Allow others to progress and grow, even if it means sometimes getting less-than-perfect results on the reports.

Motivate through love, not guilt

Fourth, eliminate guilt. I hope it goes without saying that guilt is not a proper motivational technique for leaders and teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must always motivate through love and sincere appreciation, not by creating guilt. I like the thought "Catch others doing something right."

Still there are those who experience some feelings of guilt as a consequence of their service in the Church. These feelings can come when our time and attention are being torn between competing demands and priorities. As mortals, we simply cannot do everything at once. Therefore we must do all things "in wisdom and order" (Mosiah 4:27). Often that will mean temporarily postponing attention to one prior-

ity in order to take care of another. Sometimes family demands will require your full attention. Other times professional responsibilities will come first. And there will be times when Church callings will come first. Good balance comes in doing things in a timely way and in not procrastinating our preparation or waiting to fulfill our responsibilities until the last minute.

Beyond that we need to remember that Christ came to remove guilt by forgiving those who repent (see Alma 24:10). He came to bring peace to the troubled soul. "Peace I leave with you," He said. "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Through the miraculous Atonement He urges us to "take my yoke upon you, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

As the power of the Atonement begins to work in our lives, we come to understand that the Savior has already borne the burden of our guilt. O that we may be wise enough to understand, to repent as necessary, and to let go of our guilt.

Thoughtfully allocate resources

Fifth, we need to thoughtfully allocate our resources of time, income, and energy. I would like to let you in on a little secret. Some of you have already learned it. If you haven't, it's time you knew. No matter what your family needs are or your responsibilities in the Church, there is no such thing as "done." There will always be more we can do. There is always another family matter that needs attention, another lesson to prepare, another interview to conduct, another meeting to attend. We just need to be wise in protecting our health and in following the counsel that President Hinckley has given often to just do the best that we can.

The key, it seems to me, is to know and understand your own capabilities and limitations and then to pace yourself, allo-

cating and prioritizing your time, your attention, and your resources to wisely help others, including your family, in their quest for eternal life.

Extend appropriate responsibilities

Sixth, a word to you leaders about extending responsibilities to members and especially to recent converts. President Hinckley said that every new member of the Church needs a responsibility. Whatever responsibility may be extended should not overwhelm new members but should give them ample opportunity to become comfortable in the Church by learning its doctrine and by rubbing shoulders with friendly members. It should anchor them to the restored gospel through increasing their testimony and giving meaningful service.

Helping others find joy in the gospel

Brothers and sisters, may we focus on the simple ways we can serve in the kingdom of God, always striving to change lives, including our own. What is most important in our Church responsibilities is not the statistics that are reported or the meetings that are held but whether or not individual people—ministered to one at a time just as the Savior did—have been lifted and encouraged and ultimately changed. Our task is to help others find the peace and the joy that only the gospel can give them. In seven words, Jesus summarized how we can accomplish this. He said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Today is in many ways like Jacob’s day. My counsel is like unto his: “Repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you” (Jacob 6:5). Brothers and sisters, be wise with your families. Be wise in fulfilling your Church callings. Be wise with your time. Be wise in balancing all of your responsibilities. O be wise, my beloved brothers and sisters. What can I say more?

May God bless us with wisdom to love His Son, Jesus Christ, and wisely help accomplish His work. I bear my witness and testimony that He lives. This is His Church. We are about His work. May the peace of the Lord be with us. And may we wisely carry on our responsibilities, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “Love at Home.”

President Monson

We are grateful to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they provided this morning, and likewise express appreciation to all who have participated. President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker at this session.

Following President Faust’s remarks, the choir will sing “Israel, Israel, God Is Calling.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Richard J. Maynes of the Seventy, and conference will be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

President James E. Faust

The meaning of discipleship

A large crowd followed the Savior as He ministered by the shore of the Sea of

Galilee. So that more could hear Him, He got into Peter’s fishing boat and asked to be taken a little way out from the shore. After He had finished speaking, He told

Peter, who had fished all night without success, to go out in the lake and let down his nets in the deep water. Peter obeyed, and he caught so many fish that the nets broke. Peter called to his partners, James and John, to come and help. All were amazed at the number of fish that were caught. Jesus said to Peter, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Luke then tells us, "When they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him."¹ They became the Lord's disciples.

The word for *disciple* and the word for *discipline* both come from the same Latin root—*discipulus*, which means pupil. It emphasizes practice or exercise. Self-discipline and self-control are consistent and permanent characteristics of the followers of Jesus, as exemplified by Peter, James, and John, who indeed "forsook all, and followed him."

What is discipleship? It is primarily obedience to the Savior. Discipleship includes many things. It is chastity. It is tithing. It is family home evening. It is keeping all the commandments. It is forsaking anything that is not good for us. Everything in life has a price. Considering the Savior's great promise for peace in this life and eternal life in the life to come, discipleship is a price worth paying. It is a price we cannot afford *not* to pay. By measure, the requirements of discipleship are much, much less than the promised blessings.

The disciples of Christ receive a call to not only forsake the pursuit of worldly things but to carry the cross daily. To carry the cross means to follow His commandments and to build up His Church on the earth. It also means self-mastery.² As Jesus of Nazareth instructed us, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."³ "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."⁴

The words of a beloved Primary song resonate with all who follow the Master:

I'm trying to be like Jesus; I'm following in his ways.

I'm trying to love as he did, in all that I do and say.⁵

Emulating the Savior

Let us consider some of the things Jesus did that we can all emulate.

1. Jesus "went about doing good."⁶ We can all do something good every day—for a family member, a friend, or even a stranger—if we will look for those opportunities.

2. Jesus was the Good Shepherd who watched over His sheep and had concern for those that were lost.⁷ We can seek out the lonely or those who are less active and befriend them.

3. Jesus had compassion on many, including a poor leper.⁸ We too can have compassion. We are reminded in the Book of Mormon that we are "to mourn with those that mourn."⁹

4. Jesus bore witness of His divine mission and of His Father's great work. For our part, we can all "stand as witnesses of God at all times."¹⁰

5. Jesus invited "the little children to come unto [Him]."¹¹ Our children need our attention and love as well as our care.

Willingness to lay down one's life

True followers of the Savior should be prepared to lay down their lives, and some have been privileged to do so. The Doctrine and Covenants counsels us:

"Let no man be afraid to lay down his life for my sake; for whoso layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again.

"And whoso is not willing to lay down his life for my sake is not my disciple."¹²

We read in the book of Acts the account of the disciple Stephen, who was "full of faith and power, [and] did great

wonders and miracles among the people.”¹³ Stephen encountered a hostile audience in Jerusalem who falsely accused him of blasphemy even though he was transfigured before them. Stephen testified of the divinity of the Savior, and when he called them to repentance, several in the crowd turned on him. “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”¹⁴ Even as he was stoned to death, the last words on Stephen’s lips were “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”¹⁵

Martyrs in Mexico

In the early days of the Church in Mexico, two faithful leaders who were disciples of Christ became martyrs because of their belief. The two whose lives were taken were Rafael Monroy and Vicente Morales.

During the Mexican Revolution, Rafael Monroy was the president of the small San Marcos Mexico Branch, and Vicente Morales was his first counselor. On July 17, 1915, they were apprehended by the Zapatistas. They were told they would be spared if they would give up their weapons and renounce their strange religion. Brother Monroy told his captors that he did not have any weapons and simply drew from his pocket his Bible and Book of Mormon. He said, “Gentlemen, these are the only arms I ever carry; they are the arms of truth against error.”

When no arms were found, the brethren were cruelly tortured to make them divulge where arms were hidden. But there were no arms. They were then taken under guard to the outskirts of the little town, where their captors stood them up by a large ash tree in front of a firing squad. The officer in charge offered them freedom if they would forsake their religion and join the Zapatistas, but

Brother Monroy replied, “My religion is dearer to me than my life, and I cannot forsake it.”

They were then told that they were to be shot and asked if they had any request to make. Brother Rafael requested that he be permitted to pray before he was executed. There, in the presence of his executioners, he kneeled down and, in a voice that all could hear, prayed that God would bless and protect his loved ones and care for the little struggling branch that would be left without a leader. As he finished his prayer, he used the words of the Savior when He hung upon the cross and prayed for his executioners: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”¹⁶ With that the firing squad shot both Brother Monroy and Brother Morales.¹⁷

Some years ago I went to Mexico to reorganize a stake presidency. As I conducted the interviews, I was privileged to become acquainted with one of the descendants of Rafael Monroy. I was very impressed with the depth of this man’s testimony and his commitment to the gospel. When I asked him what had happened to the rest of Brother Monroy’s descendants, he said that many of them have been on missions and continue faithful in the Church.

Faithfulness of Edward Partridge

In the early days of the Church, other disciples in addition to Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith also laid down their lives for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The faithfulness of Edward Partridge, the first bishop of the Church, is noted in the Doctrine and Covenants.¹⁸ On July 20, 1833, Edward was sitting at home with his frail wife, who had just given birth. Three mobsters burst in and dragged him into the bedlam of the street and then into the square, where they had already taken Charles Allen. A mob of about 300 demanded through their spokesman that

Edward and Charles either renounce their faith in the Book of Mormon or leave the county. Edward Partridge responded: “If I must suffer for my religion, it is no more than others have done before me. I am not conscious of having injured anyone in the county and therefore will not consent to leave. I have done nothing to offend anyone. If you abuse me, you are injuring an innocent man.” The mob then daubed Edward and Charles from head to foot with hot tar containing pearl ash, a flesh-eating acid, and then they threw feathers that stuck to the burning tar.¹⁹

The Prophet Joseph Smith characterized Edward’s death a few years later at age 46 in these words: “He lost his life in consequence of the Missouri persecutions, and he is one of that number whose blood will be required at their hands.”²⁰ Edward Partridge left a legacy that lives on in a large and righteous posterity.

Living a Christlike life every day

For most of us, however, what is required is not to *die* for the Church but to *live* for it. For many, living a Christlike life every day may be even more difficult than laying down one’s life. I learned during a time of war that many men were capable of great acts of selflessness, heroism, and nobility without regard to life. But when the war was over and they came home, they could not bear up under the ordinary daily burdens of living and became enslaved by tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and debauchery, which in the end caused them to forfeit their lives.

Some may say: “I am a simple person. I have no stature or position. I am new in the Church. My talents and abilities are limited. My contribution is little.” Or they may say: “I am too old to change. I have already lived my life. Why should I try?” It is never too late to change. Discipleship does not come from positions of prominence, wealth, or advanced learning. The

disciples of Jesus came from all walks of life. However, discipleship does require us to forsake evil transgression and enjoy what President Spencer W. Kimball has called “the miracle of forgiveness.”²¹ This can come only through repentance, which means that we forsake sin and resolve each day to be followers of truth and righteousness. As Jesus taught: “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.”²²

Many think that the price of discipleship is too costly and too burdensome. For some, it involves giving up too much. But the cross is not as heavy as it appears to be. Through obedience we acquire much greater strength to carry it.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”²³

Our true claim as disciples comes when we can say with certainty that His ways have become our ways.

Blessings of discipleship

The blessings of discipleship are readily available to all who are willing to pay the price. Discipleship brings purpose to our lives so that rather than wandering aimlessly, we walk steadily on that strait and narrow way that leads us back to our Heavenly Father. Discipleship brings us comfort in times of sorrow, peace of conscience, and joy in service—all of which help us to be more like Jesus.

Through discipleship of the Savior, we come to know and believe in our hearts and minds the saving principles and ordinances of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through our discipleship, we come to appreciate the profound mission of the Prophet Joseph

Smith in restoring those saving principles in our time. We rejoice that the keys of the priesthood and its authority have been passed down through the Presidents of the Church, from the Prophet Joseph Smith to our present prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley.

We are grateful that in our discipleship of the Savior we come to enjoy His promise of “peace in this world,”²⁴ with contentment, happiness, and fulfillment. Through our discipleship, we are able to receive the spiritual strength that we need to deal with the challenges of life.

One of the greatest blessings of life and eternity is to be counted as one of the devoted disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have a profound testimony of this truth, to which I bear witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Luke 5:1–11.
2. See Alma 39:9, footnote *b*.
3. Luke 9:23.
4. Luke 14:27.
5. “I’m Trying to Be like Jesus,” *Children’s Songbook*, 78–79.
6. Acts 10:38.

7. See Matthew 15:24; John 10:1–12.
8. See Mark 1:40–42.
9. Mosiah 18:9.
10. Mosiah 18:9.
11. Mark 10:14.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 103:27–28.
13. Acts 6:8.
14. Acts 7:55.
15. Acts 7:60.
16. Luke 23:34.
17. See Rey L. Pratt, “A Latter-day Martyr,” *Improvement Era*, June 1918, 720–26.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:19.
19. See B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:333; Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (1901–36), 1:220.
20. *History of the Church*, 4:132.
21. *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (1969), 362.
22. 3 Nephi 27:27.
23. Matthew 11:28–30.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.

The choir sang “Israel, Israel, God Is Calling.”

Elder Richard J. Maynes offered the benediction.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The second session of the 176th Semi-annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, September 30, 2006. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by a combined choir from the Provo Missionary Training Center. Douglas Brenchley directed the choir, and Linda Margetts was the organist.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the second general session of the 176th Semi-annual General Conference of The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings to all who are in attendance or who are participating by means of television, radio, or the Internet, and to the many who are watching in stake centers in various parts of the world where the conference is being carried by satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be by a choir from the Provo Missionary Training Center, under the direction of Douglas

Brenchley, with Linda Margetts at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing “Faith in Every Footstep.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Dale E. Miller of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Faith in Every Footstep.”

Elder Dale E. Miller offered the invocation.

President Monson

The choir will now sing “Jesus, Once of Humble Birth.”

Following the singing, the General Authorities, Area Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church will be presented for sustaining vote.

The choir sang “Jesus, Once of Humble Birth.”

The Sustaining of Church Officers

President Thomas S. Monson

Such beautiful singing. I hope you noted the missionary badge on each one, soon to be departing the Missionary Training Center for their assignments all over the world.

My brothers and sisters, President Hinckley has requested that I now present to you the General Authorities, Area Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church for your sustaining vote.

It is proposed that we sustain Gordon Bitner Hinckley as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Thomas Spencer Monson as First Counselor in the First Presidency; and James Esdras Faust as Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Those in favor may manifest it. Those opposed, if any, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain Thomas Spencer Monson as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Boyd Kenneth Packer as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and the following as members of that quorum: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland,

Henry B. Eyring, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and David A. Bednar. Those in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. All in favor may manifest it. Contrary, if there be any, by the same sign.

We extend a release to Elders Ronald T. Halverson, Dale E. Miller, H. Bryan Richards, Donald L. Staheli, David R. Stone, H. Bruce Stucki, Robert J. Whetten, and Richard H. Winkel as members of the Second Quorum of the Seventy. Those who wish to join with us in expressing appreciation to these Brethren, please manifest it.

With similar appreciation we also extend a release to César A. S. Milder, Hyae-Kee Min, and Masayuki Nakano as Area Seventies. Those who wish to join with us in doing so, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Erich W. Kopischke as a new Area Seventy. All in favor, please manifest. Any opposed, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain the other General Authorities, Area Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies as presently

constituted. Those in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed may manifest it.

It appears that the sustaining has been unanimous in the affirmative, President Hinckley. Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your continued faith and prayers.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elders Robert D. Hales and Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and they will be followed by Sister Elaine S. Dalton, second counselor in the Young Women general presidency.

Elder Robert D. Hales

The scriptures are for our salvation

The holy scriptures are the word of God given to us for our salvation. The scriptures are essential in receiving a testimony of Jesus Christ and His gospel. The scriptures given to us by God in these latter days are the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. These sacred records bear testimony of the Savior and lead us to Him. That is why great prophets like Enos cried unto the Lord in faith to preserve the scriptures.

Will you open with me the cover of the Book of Mormon? Look on the title page. We read that it is “written by way of commandment, . . . by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation.” It has “come forth by the gift and power of God,” and its interpretation is “by the gift of God”—by the Holy Ghost. It shows “what great things the Lord [has] done” and has given to us “that [we] may know the covenants of the Lord,” that we might not be “cast off forever.” Most importantly, it has been written to convince us “that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.”

Turn the page again, to the introduction. Here we learn that this prophetic record is “holy scripture comparable to the Bible.” It contains “the fulness of the everlasting gospel . . . , outlines the plan of salvation, and tells [us] what [we] must do to gain peace in this life and eternal salvation in the life to come.” It promises each

of us that “all who will come unto [the Savior] and obey the laws and ordinances of his gospel may be saved.”

What is the vital role of this sacred book in our day? What is its message regarding the purpose of all scripture?

Book of Mormon teachings on scriptures

On page one of the book of 1 Nephi—the very first book in the Book of Mormon—we learn that Lehi, in about 600 B.C., was directed by God to take his family and flee into the wilderness. But Lehi didn’t get very far before the Lord commanded him to send his sons back. Why? To retrieve the scriptures, the brass plates, which were so important that Lehi’s sons risked their lives and lost all their worldly possessions to recover them! Ultimately, it was the Lord’s help and Nephi’s faith that miraculously delivered the plates into his hands. When Nephi and his brothers returned, Lehi, their father, rejoiced. He began to search the holy scriptures “from the beginning” and “found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth . . . insomuch that [Lehi and his posterity] could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto [their] children.”¹

Indeed, the brass plates were a record of Lehi’s fathers, including their language, genealogy, and, more importantly, the gospel taught by God’s holy prophets. As Lehi searched the plates, he learned what all of us learn by studying the scriptures:

- Who we are.
- What we can become.
- Prophecies for us and for our posterity.
- The commandments, laws, ordinances, and covenants we must live by to obtain eternal life.
- And how we must live in order to endure to the end and return to our Heavenly Father with honor.

So essential are these truths that Heavenly Father gave both Lehi and Nephi visions vividly representing the word of God as a rod of iron. Both father and son learned that holding to this strong, unbending, utterly reliable guide is the *only* way to stay on that strait and narrow path that leads to our Savior.

Several chapters of the Book of Mormon are devoted to Lehi and Nephi applying this lesson—searching the scriptures and quoting from them. Clearly they wanted their families and us to understand the importance of the scriptures, especially Isaiah’s prophecies about the Restoration of the gospel and the coming forth of *their* record—the Book of Mormon—in our day.

Consequences of disregarding scriptures

The Book of Mormon records how a number of civilizations regarded or *disregarded* the scriptures, beginning with Lehi’s own family. The Lord had commanded Lehi to flee Jerusalem because it was going to be captured by the Babylonians and to journey across the sea to the promised land in a divinely designed ship. But Lehi’s children were bitterly divided into two factions. Those who followed righteous Nephi—the Nephites—retained the scriptures when they departed the Lamanites, and “their souls were illuminated by the light of [God’s] everlasting word.”²

But Laman and Lemuel—and their descendants, the Lamanites—rejected the

scriptures and walked in the darkness of ignorance, contention, and destruction. In about A.D. 400, the Nephites also rejected the word of God, dwindled in unbelief, and were destroyed, thus ending approximately 1,000 years of Nephite civilization.

The book of Ether gives a history of a civilization, the Jaredites, who left the Old World at the time of the Tower of Babel, approximately 2200 B.C. The Lord directed them to journey across the sea to the promised land in divinely designed barges. When the Jaredites were righteous, they were blessed; and when they rejected the word of the Lord and refused to repent, the Spirit of the Lord ceased striving with them. Eventually they departed from the Lord’s ways and destroyed one another in about 600 B.C., thus ending approximately 1,600 years of Jaredite civilization.

Lehi arrived in the promised land about the time of the destruction of the Jaredites. A few years later, still another civilization, Mulek and his followers, also came to the promised land. They discovered the last recorded survivor of the Jaredites, a king named Coriantumr. The Mulekites brought no scriptures with them; so about 400 years later, when Mosiah and the Nephites found them, the Mulekites’ language was corrupted, and they had lost their belief in their Creator. They did not know who they were. When the Mulekites learned that the Lord had sent the Nephites with the plates of brass, which contained the scriptural record of the Jews, they rejoiced and joined themselves to the Nephite civilization.

The fate of these civilizations, as recorded in scripture, is a testimony to all the world: if we don’t have the word of God or don’t cling to and heed the word of God, we will wander off in strange paths and be lost as individuals, as families, and as nations.

As with voices from the dust, the prophets of the Lord cry out to us on

earth today: take hold of the scriptures! Cling to them, walk by them, live by them, rejoice in them, feast on them. Don't nibble. They are "the power of God unto salvation"³ that lead us back to our Savior Jesus Christ.

The Savior taught from the scriptures

If the Savior were among us in the flesh today, He would teach us from the scriptures as He taught when He walked upon the earth. In the synagogue at Nazareth, "there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. . . . And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."⁴ Later when the Sadducees and Pharisees posed a difficult question, "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."⁵ And after His Resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, His disciples "said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"⁶ To His disciples then and now, His words ring out: "Search the scriptures; for . . . they are they which testify of me"⁷—a testimony borne by the Holy Ghost, for "by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things."⁸

Hearing the Lord's voice

Brothers and sisters, I testify that the scriptures have been "kept and preserved [for us] by the hand of the Lord . . . for a wise purpose in him."⁹ Lehi prophesied, "These plates of brass should never perish; neither should they be dimmed any more by time."¹⁰ The Lord covenanted with Enos to preserve and bring forth the scriptures "in his . . . due time."¹¹ Of the Book of Mormon, the prophet Moroni recorded, it was "written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed."¹² The scriptures which

we have give prophecies and promises, and they have been fulfilled in *our* day.

What a glorious blessing! For when we want to speak to God, we pray. And when we want Him to speak to us, we search the scriptures; for His words are spoken through His prophets. He will then teach us as we listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

If you have not heard His voice speaking to you lately, return with new eyes and new ears to the scriptures. They are our spiritual lifeline. Behind the darkness of the Iron Curtain, the Saints survived because they heard His voice through the scriptures. In other parts of the world, when members couldn't attend church for a time, they continued to worship God because they heard His voice through the scriptures. Throughout all the wars of the past century and the conflicts that rage today, Latter-day Saints survive because they hear His voice through the scriptures. For the Lord has said, "The scriptures shall be given . . . to the salvation of mine own elect; for they will hear my voice, and shall see me, and shall not be asleep, and shall abide the day of my coming; for they shall be purified, even as I am pure."¹³

The need for the scriptures today

Over two millennia ago, Isaiah wrote of the word of God, "Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever."¹⁴ That time is now. This world needs the scriptures today. Before the coming of the Savior, it was necessary that all God's children be tutored in the preparatory law of Moses, which allowed "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."¹⁵ Many in this world still live by that fearsome code, and the evidence of it is around us.

We boldly declare that the answer to the terror, destruction, and even genocide

of these last days is found in the scriptures. The gospel in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament. The prophecies in the Bible came to pass in the Book of Mormon. The Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price bear witness of the fulness of the gospel which is now upon the earth.

From Genesis to Malachi and from Moses to Abraham, it was prophesied the Savior would come. From the books of Matthew to Revelation, from Nephi to Moroni, and from Joseph Smith to our beloved living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, the prophets all testify that Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, has come and will come again. In Him “old things are done away, and all things have become new.”¹⁶ Through the holy scriptures, His new and everlasting gospel proclaims: “Love thy neighbour as thyself.”¹⁷ “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.”¹⁸ “Of you it is required to forgive all men.”¹⁹ For this is the gospel of our Savior, who is anointed “to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised.”²⁰

Moroni’s plea

At the end of the Book of Mormon, Moroni figuratively looks out over the last remnant of his people. He knew their extinction could have been avoided if they had not forgotten God’s holy word and lost the Spirit of the Lord. Is it any wonder that Moroni writes personally to us, to you and to me, pleading for us to claim the blessings of the scriptures?

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name

of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, *by the power of the Holy Ghost.*

“And *by the power of the Holy Ghost* ye may know the truth of all things.”²¹

We are living in the latter days, brothers and sisters, in the fulness of times. We must remember that we have control over who we are no matter how difficult the world becomes. Like those in 1 Nephi, the true and faithful will be able to withstand the fiery darts of the adversary when he is loosed upon this earth.²² Despite all the turmoil in the world, when the Savior comes to His temple, as He did in the Book of Mormon, those who are true and faithful will be there. May we be among them, I so pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 1 Nephi 5:10, 21.
2. Alma 5:7.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 68:4.
4. Luke 4:17, 21.
5. Matthew 22:29.
6. Luke 24:32.
7. John 5:39.
8. Moroni 10:5.
9. Alma 37:4, 14; see also 1 Nephi 9:5; Words of Mormon 1:7.
10. 1 Nephi 5:19.
11. Enos 1:16.
12. Book of Mormon title page.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 35:20–21.
14. Isaiah 30:8.
15. Matthew 5:38; see also 3 Nephi 12:38.
16. 3 Nephi 12:47.
17. Matthew 22:39.
18. Matthew 5:44; see also 3 Nephi 12:44.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.
20. Luke 4:18.
21. Moroni 10:4–5; italics added.
22. See 1 Nephi 15:24.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

I am grateful to be with you today and to draw strength from your testimonies. More than words can express, I am grateful for your kind words of support, your expressions of love, and your prayers.

Today I would like to indulge in a few personal memories.

Elder Wirthlin's parents and sister

I was born of goodly parents. From my father, Joseph L. Wirthlin, I learned the values of hard work and compassion. He was bishop of our ward during the Great Depression. He possessed a genuine concern for those in distress. He reached out to those in need not because it was his duty but because it was his sincere desire.

He tirelessly cared for and blessed the lives of many who suffered. In my mind, he was an ideal bishop.

Those who knew my father knew how active he was. Someone once told me that he could do the work of three men. He rarely slowed down. In 1938 he was operating a successful business when he received a call from the President of the Church, Heber J. Grant.

President Grant told him they were reorganizing the Presiding Bishopric that day and wanted my father to serve as counselor to LeGrand Richards. This caught my father by surprise, and he asked if he could pray about it first.

President Grant said, "Brother Wirthlin, there are only 30 minutes before the next session of conference, and I want to have some rest. What do you say?"

Of course my father said yes. He served 23 years, 9 of them as Presiding Bishop of the Church.

My father was 69 years old when he passed away. I happened to be with him when he suddenly collapsed. Soon after, he was gone.

I often think about my father. I miss him.

My mother, Madeline Bitner, was another great influence in my life. In her youth she was a fine athlete and a champion sprinter. She was always kind and loving, but her pace was exhausting. Often she would say, "Hurry up." And when she did, we picked up the pace. Perhaps that was one of the reasons I had quick acceleration when I played football.

My mother had great expectations for her children and expected the best from them. I can still remember her saying, "Don't be a scrub. You must do better." *Scrub* was her word for someone who was lazy and not living up to his potential.

My mother passed away when she was 87 years old, and I think about her often and miss her more than I can say.

My younger sister Judith was an author, composer, and educator. She loved many things, including the gospel, music, and archaeology. Judith's birthday was a few days before mine. Every year I would give her a crisp one-dollar bill as my birthday present to her. Three days later she would give me 50 cents as her birthday present to me.

Judith passed away a few years ago. I miss her and think of her often.

Elder Wirthlin's wife

And that brings me to my wife, Elisa. I remember the first time I met her. As a favor to a friend, I had gone to her home to pick up her sister, Frances. Elisa opened the door, and at least for me, it was love at first sight.

I think she must have felt something too, for the first words I ever remember her saying were, "I knew who you was."

Elisa was an English major.

To this day I still cherish those five words as some of the most beautiful in human language.

She loved to play tennis and had a lightning serve. I tried to play tennis with her, but I finally quit after coming to the realization that I couldn't hit what I couldn't see.

She was my strength and my joy. Because of her, I am a better man, husband, and father. We married, had eight children, and walked together through 65 years of life.

I owe more to my wife than I can possibly express. I don't know if there ever was a perfect marriage, but, from my perspective, I think ours was.

When President Hinckley spoke at Sister Wirthlin's funeral, he said that it is a devastating, consuming thing to lose someone you love. It gnaws at your soul.

He was right. As Elisa was my greatest joy, now her passing is my greatest sorrow.

In the lonely hours I have spent a great deal of time thinking about eternal things. I have contemplated the comforting doctrines of eternal life.

The gift of the Resurrection

During my life I have heard many sermons on the Resurrection. Like you, I can recite the events of that first Easter Sunday. I have marked in my scriptures passages regarding the Resurrection and have close at hand many of the key statements uttered by latter-day prophets on this subject.

We know what the Resurrection is—the reuniting of the spirit and body in its perfect form.¹

President Joseph F. Smith said “that those from whom we have to part here, we will meet again and see as they are. We will meet the same identical being that we associated with here in the flesh.”²

President Spencer W. Kimball amplified this when he said, “I am sure that if we can imagine ourselves at our very best, physically, mentally, spiritually, that is the way we will come back.”³

When we are resurrected, “this mortal body is raised to an immortal body. . . . [We] can die no more.”⁴

Can you imagine that? Life at our prime? Never sick, never in pain, never burdened by the ills that so often beset us in mortality?

The Resurrection is at the core of our beliefs as Christians. Without it, our faith is meaningless. The Apostle Paul said, “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and [our] faith is also vain.”⁵

In all the history of the world there have been many great and wise souls, many of whom claimed special knowledge of God. But when the Savior rose from the tomb, He did something no one had ever done. He did something no one else could do. He broke the bonds of death, not only for Himself but for all who have ever lived—the just and the unjust.⁶

When Christ rose from the grave, becoming the firstfruits of the Resurrection, He made that gift available to all. And with that sublime act, He softened the devastating, consuming sorrow that gnaws at the souls of those who have lost precious loved ones.

The dark Friday of the Crucifixion

I think of how dark that Friday was when Christ was lifted up on the cross.

On that terrible Friday the earth shook and grew dark. Frightful storms lashed at the earth.

Those evil men who sought His life rejoiced. Now that Jesus was no more, surely those who followed Him would disperse. On that day they stood triumphant.

On that day the veil of the temple was rent in twain.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were both overcome with grief and despair. The superb man they had loved and honored hung lifeless upon the cross.

On that Friday the Apostles were devastated. Jesus, their Savior—the man who

had walked on water and raised the dead—was Himself at the mercy of wicked men. They watched helplessly as He was overcome by His enemies.

On that Friday the Savior of mankind was humiliated and bruised, abused and reviled.

It was a Friday filled with devastating, consuming sorrow that gnawed at the souls of those who loved and honored the Son of God.

I think that of all the days since the beginning of this world's history, that Friday was the darkest.

Sunday will come

But the doom of that day did not endure.

The despair did not linger, because on Sunday, the resurrected Lord burst the bonds of death. He ascended from the grave and appeared gloriously triumphant as the Savior of all mankind.

And in an instant the eyes that had been filled with ever-flowing tears dried. The lips that had whispered prayers of distress and grief now filled the air with wondrous praise, for Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, stood before them as the firstfruits of the Resurrection, the proof that death is merely the beginning of a new and wondrous existence.

Each of us will have our own Fridays—those days when the universe itself seems shattered and the shards of our world lie littered about us in pieces. We all will experience those broken times when it seems we can never be put together again. We will all have our Fridays.

But I testify to you in the name of the One who conquered death—Sunday will come. In the darkness of our sorrow, Sunday will come.

No matter our desperation, no matter our grief, Sunday will come. In this life or the next, Sunday will come.

Testimonies of the Resurrection

I testify to you that the Resurrection is not a fable. We have the personal testimonies of those who saw Him. Thousands in the Old and New Worlds witnessed the risen Savior. They felt the wounds in His hands, feet, and side. They shed tears of unrestrained joy as they embraced Him.

After the Resurrection, the disciples became renewed. They traveled throughout the world proclaiming the glorious news of the gospel.

Had they chosen, they could have disappeared and returned to their former lives and occupations. In time, their association with Him would have been forgotten.

They could have denied the divinity of Christ. Yet they did not. In the face of danger, ridicule, and threat of death, they entered palaces, temples, and synagogues boldly proclaiming Jesus the Christ, the resurrected Son of the living God.

Many of them offered as a final testimony their own precious lives. They died as martyrs, the testimony of the risen Christ on their lips as they perished.

The Resurrection transformed the lives of those who witnessed it. Should it not transform ours?

Blessings of the Resurrection

We will all rise from the grave. And on that day my father will embrace my mother. On that day I will once again hold in my arms my beloved Elisa.

Because of the life and eternal sacrifice of the Savior of the world, we will be reunited with those we have cherished.

On that day we will know the love of our Heavenly Father. On that day we will rejoice that the Messiah overcame all, that we could live forever.

Because of the sacred ordinances we receive in holy temples, our departure from this brief mortality cannot long sepa-

rate relationships that have been fastened together with cords made of eternal ties.

It is my solemn testimony that death is not the end of existence. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”⁷ Because of the risen Christ, “death is swallowed up in victory.”⁸

Because of our beloved Redeemer, we can lift up our voices, even in the midst of our darkest Fridays, and proclaim: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”⁹

When President Hinckley spoke of the terrible loneliness that comes to those who lose the ones they love, he also promised that in the quiet of the night a still, unheard voice whispers peace to our soul: “All is well.”

I am grateful beyond measure for the sublime, true doctrines of the gospel and for the gift of the Holy Ghost, which has whispered to my soul the comforting and peaceful words promised by our beloved prophet.

From the depths of my sorrow, I have rejoiced in the glory of the gospel. I rejoice that the Prophet Joseph Smith was

chosen to restore the gospel to the earth in this last dispensation. I rejoice that we have a prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, who directs the Lord’s Church in our day.

May we understand and live in thanksgiving for the priceless gifts that come to us as sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father and for the promise of that bright day when we shall all rise triumphant from the grave.

That we may always know that no matter how dark our Friday, Sunday will come is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Alma 11:43.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 91.
3. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 45.
4. Alma 11:45.
5. 1 Corinthians 15:14.
6. See John 5:28–29.
7. 1 Corinthians 15:19.
8. 1 Corinthians 15:54.
9. 1 Corinthians 15:55.

Elaine S. Dalton

Importance of living a worthy life

When our first grandson was born, the entire family rushed to the hospital. It was an amazing experience for me to see our oldest son, Matthew, holding this precious new baby boy. While standing at the nursery window with our youngest son, Chad, we gazed into the eyes of this new little spirit—so clean, so pure, so recently from heaven. It seemed that all time stood still, and for an instant, we could see the great eternal plan. The sacredness of life was crystal clear, and I whispered to Chad, “Do you understand why it is so important to remain clean and pure?” He

responded reverently, “Oh yes, Mom, I get it.”

That moment was so powerful that I desire for every young man and woman, every young adult, and indeed each one of us to feel and know the importance of living a worthy and pure life. It is our personal worthiness that will qualify us to fulfill our individual earthly missions.

Our personal mission began long before we arrived on the earth. In the pre-mortal life, we were “called and prepared” to live on the earth at a time when temptations and challenges would be the greatest. This was “on account of [our] exceeding faith and good works” and because of our

“having chosen good.”¹ We understood our Father’s plan and knew that it was good. We not only chose it, but we defended it. We knew that our earthly missions would be fraught with temptation, challenges, and hardship, but we also knew that we would be blessed by the fulness of the gospel, living prophets, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. We knew and understood that our success on this earth would be determined by our worthiness and purity.

What it means to be worthy

What does it mean to be worthy? In the Book of Mormon, Lamoni’s father implored, “What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken?”² Then the king made a commitment to the Lord by saying, “I will give away all my sins to know thee.”³ Once Lamoni’s father understood who he was and the great plan of which he was a part, worthiness became his heart’s desire.

To become worthy, we make choices that will enable us to return to our Heavenly Father’s presence. We do those things which will qualify us to claim all the blessings that He has in store for us. This is the reason we are here on the earth—“to see if [we] will do all things whatsoever the Lord . . . shall command.”⁴ It is through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that we can resist temptation.⁵ Our faith will enable us to shun evil. It will be repulsive to us because “light cleaveth unto light” and “virtue loveth virtue.”⁶

To become unspotted from the world requires not only faith but repentance and obedience. We must live the standards and do those things which will entitle us to the constant companionship and guidance of the Holy Ghost—for the Spirit cannot dwell in unholy temples.⁷

One young man I know said: “It’s just too hard. Living the standards in my world is not realistic. It’s just too hard.” Yet knowing that we are sons and daughters

of God, we must strive for worthiness. Another group of youth adopted the motto “I Can Do Hard Things.” They understand their identity, their mission, their source of guidance, and they receive strength through keeping their covenants. They also understand that when they make a mistake, they can change! Satan wants all of us to think that repentance is not possible. This is absolutely not true. The Savior has promised forgiveness.⁸ Each week, worthily partaking of the sacrament makes it possible for each of us to become clean and pure as we covenant to “always remember [the Savior], and keep his commandments.”⁹ The gospel of Jesus Christ is one of simplicity, and we are given the tools that make the pathway straight and narrow. The way is clear: “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”¹⁰

Counsel received during temple wedding

Thirty-eight years ago my husband and I were married in the Salt Lake Temple by President Gordon B. Hinckley. The counsel and direction he gave us that day have become a beacon for our lives. When we left the temple as husband and wife, we went to a park near the temple grounds and recorded in a journal the words of wisdom we had received. He counseled us to always remember our prayers night and morning, to pray as a couple and as a family. He counseled us to always pay a full and honest tithing. He counseled us to read the scriptures daily and to apply the principles in our lives. And he counseled us to remain worthy. He said, “Always live in such a way that when you need the Lord’s blessings, you can call upon Him and receive them because you are worthy.” He said: “There will come times in your life when you will need immediate blessings. You will need to live in such a way that they will be granted—not out of mercy but because you are worthy.” I didn’t comprehend then what that meant, but in the 38

years that have followed, we have called upon our Father in Heaven for many “immediate blessings.” Daily, these holy habits and righteous routines have helped steady us on the path that leads back into our Father’s presence. And today I say, “We thank thee, O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days.”¹¹

Worthiness for temple blessings

Personal worthiness is essential to enter His holy temples and to ultimately become heirs to “all [the] Father hath.”¹² The Lord has said, “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.”¹³ When we do this, we can confidently enter the holy temples of God with a knowledge that we are worthy to go where the Lord Himself goes. When we are worthy, we can not only *enter* the temple, the temple can *enter* us. The Lord’s promises of salvation and happiness become *ours*—and our earthly mission becomes *His*.

Just last month our youngest son, Chad, went to the temple with a beautiful, worthy young woman to be married for time and all eternity. As he took her hand and knelt at the altar, I looked into the mirrors on either side, and again I wanted to whisper, “Do you understand why it is so important to be clean and pure?” But this time I didn’t have to remind him, because the Spirit did the whispering.

To the youth of the noble birthright, look into the windows of eternity! See yourselves in the Lord’s holy temples. See

yourselves living worthy and pure lives. Generations are depending on you! I testify that worthiness is possible because of the redeeming and enabling power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I pray that it may be said of each one of us, “They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”¹⁴ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Alma 13:3.
2. Alma 22:15.
3. Alma 22:18.
4. Abraham 3:25.
5. See Alma 37:33; 3 Nephi 7:18.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:40.
7. See Helaman 4:24.
8. See *For the Strength of Youth* (2001), 30.
9. Moroni 4:3.
10. Matthew 11:30.
11. “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet,” *Hymns*, no. 19.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 84:38; see also vv. 35–37.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
14. Revelation 3:4; see also v. 5.

President Monson

The choir and congregation will now sing “High on the Mountain Top.” Following the singing, we will hear from Elders Shayne M. Bowen and Daniel L. Johnson of the Seventy. They will be followed by Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang
“High on the Mountain Top.”

Elder Shayne M. Bowen

Two beautiful places in Idaho

In Idaho Falls, Idaho, there is a beautiful airport. One of the largest in the region, this airport allows easy access to the

Upper Snake River Valley. I remember as a young man returning from Chile to this very airport and greeting my family after two years of missionary service. Similar scenes have taken place thousands of

times in this airport as the faithful Saints answer the call to serve. It is a very useful, integral part of the city and region.

Near the airport is another very useful and beautiful part of the city—Freeman Park. The Snake River runs along this park for about two miles. There is a walking path that goes through the park and follows on around the river for miles.

Freeman Park has acres and acres of green grass filled with baseball and softball diamonds, swing sets for children, picnic shelters for family reunions, beautiful lanes filled with trees and bushes for strolling sweethearts. Looking down the river from the park, one can see the majestic Idaho Falls Temple, white and clean, standing on high ground. The sound of the rushing waters of the Snake River as it works its way through natural lava outcroppings makes this park very desirable. It is one of my favorite places to walk with my sweetheart, Lynette, relax, contemplate, and meditate. It is very peaceful and inspiring.

Why do I talk about the regional airport and Freeman Park in Idaho Falls? Because they are both built on the same kind of ground; both of these beautiful, useful places used to be sanitary landfills.

A sanitary landfill is where garbage is buried between layers of earth. Webster's dictionary defines a landfill as "a system of trash and garbage disposal in which the waste is buried between layers of earth to build up low-lying land" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. [2003], 699).

Another definition of a landfill is "a place where garbage is buried and the land is reclaimed." The definition of *reclaim* is "to recall from wrong or improper conduct . . . to rescue from an undesirable state" (1039).

Digging up old garbage

I have lived in Idaho Falls nearly my whole life. I have contributed a lot of

garbage to those landfills over the course of more than 50 years.

What would the city fathers think if on a given day I showed up on one of the runways of the Idaho Falls airport or the middle of one of the grassy fields in Freeman Park with a backhoe and started digging large holes? When they asked me what I was doing, I would respond that I wanted to dig up the old garbage that I had made over the years.

I suspect they would tell me that there was no way to identify my personal garbage, that it had been reclaimed and buried long ago. I'm sure that they would tell me that I had no right to dig up the garbage and that I was destroying something very beautiful and useful that they had made out of my garbage. In short, I don't think they would be very pleased with me. I suppose that they would wonder why anyone would want to destroy something so beautiful and useful in an attempt to dig up old garbage.

The reclaiming power of the Atonement

Is it possible to reclaim a life that through reckless abandon has become so strewn with garbage that it appears that the person is unforgivable? Or what about the one who is making an honest effort but has fallen back into sin so many times that he feels that there is no possible way to break the seemingly endless pattern? Or what about the person who has changed his life but just can't forgive himself?

Referring to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the prophet Alma taught the people in Gideon:

"And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

"And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take

upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

“Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me” (Alma 7:11–13).

Also speaking of the Atonement, Jacob, the brother of Nephi, taught: “Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” (2 Nephi 9:7).

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is available to each of us. His Atonement is infinite. It applies to everyone, even you. It can clean, reclaim, and sanctify even you. That is what infinite means—total, complete, all, forever. President Boyd K. Packer has taught: “There is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is

the promise of the atonement of Christ” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 23; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 20).

Accepting and using gift of repentance

Just as the landfill requires dedicated work and attention, laboriously applying layer after layer of fill to reclaim the low-lying ground, our lives also require the same vigilance, continually applying layer after layer of the healing gift of repentance.

Just as the city fathers in Idaho Falls would feel bad about a person trying to dig up his old garbage, our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, feel sorrow when we choose to remain in sin, when the gift of repentance made possible through the Atonement can clean, reclaim, and sanctify our lives.

When we gratefully accept and use this precious gift, we can enjoy the beauty and usefulness of our lives that God has reclaimed through His infinite love and the Atonement of His Son and our brother, Jesus Christ.

I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that His Atonement is real, and that through the miracle of forgiveness, He can make each of us clean again, even you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Daniel L. Johnson

Our tithing obligation

My remarks this afternoon are intended as an invitation to those who have not yet gained a personal testimony of the full payment of tithing. There are many reasons that are used to not pay tithing, such as medical emergencies, debts, car or home repairs, educational expenses, and

insurance. These reasons and others like them are very real and are lived and dealt with every day by many, if not most, of us. These tax our limited financial resources and, if we are not wise stewards of these resources, may result in the inability to meet our tithing obligation to the Lord. A lack of compliance with this eternal law is not to be taken lightly and can not only se-

riously impair our spiritual growth and development, but it can also limit the physical and temporal blessings that we could otherwise enjoy.

As President Spencer W. Kimball once said: “The Lord herein makes clear that tithing is his law and is required of all his followers. It is our honor and privilege, our safety and promise, our great blessing to live this law of God. To fail to meet this obligation in full is to deny ourselves the promises and is to omit a weighty matter. It is a transgression, not an inconsequential oversight.”¹

Definition of tithing

So what is a tithing? The Lord has given us His definition: “And this shall be the beginning of the tithing of my people. And after that, those who have thus been tithed shall pay one-tenth of all their interest annually; and this shall be a standing law unto them forever.”² Please note that the tithe is not just any freewill offering, nor is it a 20th or some other fraction of our annual interest or income.

President Howard W. Hunter stated it this way: “The law is simply stated as ‘one-tenth of all their interest.’ Interest means profit, compensation, increase. It is the wage of one employed, the profit from the operation of a business, the increase of one who grows or produces, or the income to a person from any other source. The Lord said it is a standing law ‘forever’ as it has been in the past.”³

Use of tithing funds

How is tithing used? Faithful members of the Church pay their tithing to a member of their branch presidency or ward bishopric. Under the direction of the Lord’s prophet, these funds are then gathered and used to fund the growth and development of the Church throughout the world. Examples of the use of tithing

funds are the construction of temples, the financing of the worldwide missionary effort, the building and maintenance of meetinghouses, and other worthy purposes.

A key to temporal and spiritual blessings

Why does the Lord require His people to pay tithing? The Lord is our Father, and as our Father, He loves us. Because He loves us, He wants to bless us both temporally and spiritually. Listen to some of His statements as written in the scriptures: “Hearken and hear, O ye my people, saith the Lord and your God, ye whom I delight to bless with the greatest of all blessings.”⁴ And another: “For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.”⁵

In order to bestow His blessings on His children in a just and equitable manner, the Lord has instituted laws that govern those blessings that He wants all of us to enjoy. He has revealed this principle of laws to His prophet of the Restoration: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”⁶ And again: “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.”⁷

The Lord knew from the beginning that we, His children, would be faced with temporal and spiritual adversities during this mortal life. Indeed, these adversities are a vital part of this mortal probation. He knew that we would stand in need of His blessings throughout our lives in order to not only survive our individual trials, but also to enjoy a degree of comfort and even prosperity.

Thus the law of tithing, which was instituted from the beginning. We know from the scriptures that Abraham was blessed through his obedience to this law, and we now have that same law as it was reiterated by the Savior during His visit to the inhabitants of the American continent almost 2,000 years ago:

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the fields, saith the Lord of Hosts.

“And all nations shall call you blessed, for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of Hosts.”⁸

What a marvelous law! He who has not only the power and the means to bless His children temporally and spiritually, but also the desire to do so, has provided to us the key to those blessings that we both need and desire. This key is the law of tithing. Indeed, as stated by President James E. Faust: “Some may feel that they cannot afford to pay tithing, but the Lord has promised that He would prepare a way for us to keep all of His commandments. To pay tithing takes a leap of faith in the beginning. . . . We learn about tithing by paying it. Indeed, I believe it is possible to break out of poverty by having the faith to give back to the Lord part of what little we have.”⁹ My brothers and sisters, we have but to obey the law.

Invitation to pay a full tithe

Now the invitation: To those who are not yet full-tithe payers, I invite you to begin today to pay your full tithing to the Lord through your local priesthood

leader. I invite you to pay your tithing to the Lord first, before you meet any other financial obligations. I invite you to put your trust in the Lord and, as He Himself said, “Prove me now herewith.”¹⁰ As you do so and as you place your tithing obligation to the Lord as the first priority of all of your other financial obligations, you will indeed become a witness to the matchless power of the Lord as He opens the windows of heaven and pours out a blessing “that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”¹¹ You will then have gained your own personal testimony of this very sacred law of tithing, and as you continue your obedience to this law, it will draw you ever closer to the Lord.

To those of you who are already tithe payers, I commend you for your faithfulness. You are already witnesses and have your own personal testimonies as to the fulfillment of the Lord’s promises to those who obey this commandment, and each time you pay your tithing, your personal commitment to the Lord increases.

I bear you my own personal witness of the law of tithing and of the reality of the promises that the Lord has given regarding this law. I know from personal experience that the blessings do indeed come, and for that I am most grateful. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. “President Kimball Speaks Out on Tithing,” *New Era*, Apr. 1981, 6.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 119:3–4.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1964, 35; or *Improvement Era*, June 1964, 476.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 41:1.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 76:5.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
8. 3 Nephi 24:10–12; see also Malachi 3:10–12.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 74; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 59.
10. 3 Nephi 24:10; see also Malachi 3:10.
11. 3 Nephi 24:10; see also Malachi 3:10.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf

The power of Nephi's testimony

In the Book of Mormon, we read of young Nephi, who was commanded by the Lord to build a ship. He was quick to obey this commandment, but his brothers were skeptical. "When my brethren saw that I was about to build a ship," he wrote, "they began to murmur against me, saying: Our brother is a fool, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters" (1 Nephi 17:17).

But Nephi was not discouraged. He had no experience building ships, but he had a strong personal testimony "that the Lord . . . [would] prepare a way . . . [to] accomplish the thing which he commandeth" (1 Nephi 3:7). With this powerful testimony and motivation in his heart, Nephi built a ship in which they crossed the great waters, despite the strong opposition expressed by his faithless brothers.

A desire to become a pilot

Let me share with you a personal experience from my own youth about the power of righteous motives.

After the turmoil of the Second World War, my family ended up in Russian-occupied East Germany. When I attended fourth grade I had to learn Russian as my first foreign language in school. I found this quite difficult because of the Cyrillic alphabet, but as time went on I seemed to do all right.

When I turned 11 we had to leave East Germany overnight because of the political orientation of my father. Now I was going to school in West Germany, which was American-occupied at that time. There in school all children were required to learn English and not Russian. To learn Russian had been difficult, but

English was impossible for me. I thought my mouth was not made for speaking English. My teachers struggled. My parents suffered. And I knew English was definitely not my language.

But then something changed in my young life. Almost daily I rode my bicycle to the airport and watched airplanes take off and land. I read, studied, and learned everything I could find about aviation. It was my greatest desire to become a pilot. I could already picture myself in the cockpit of an airliner or in a military fighter plane. I felt deep in my heart this was my thing!

Then I learned that to become a pilot I needed to speak English. Overnight, to the total surprise of everybody, it appeared as if my mouth had changed. I was able to learn English. It still took a lot of work, persistence, and patience, but I was able to learn English!

Why? Because of a righteous and strong motive!

A testimony of the restored gospel

Our motives and thoughts ultimately influence our actions. The testimony of the truthfulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is the most powerful motivating force in our lives. Jesus repeatedly emphasized the power of good thoughts and proper motives: "Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not" (D&C 6:36).

The testimony of Jesus Christ and the restored gospel will help us in our lives to learn of God's specific plan for us and then to act accordingly. It gives us assurance of the reality, truth, and goodness of God, of the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, and of the divine calling of latter-day prophets. Our testimony motivates us to live righteously, and righteous living will cause our testimony to grow stronger.

Explanation of the term *testimony*

What is a testimony? One definition of *testimony* is “a solemn attestation as to the truth of a matter,” originating from the Latin word *testimonium* and the word *testis*, meaning “witness” (“Testimony,” <http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Testimony>; *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. [2003], “testimony,” 1291).

For members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the term *testimony* is a warm and familiar word in our religious expressions. It is tender and sweet. It has always a certain sacredness about it. When we talk about testimony, we refer to feelings of our heart and mind rather than an accumulation of logical, sterile facts. It is a gift of the Spirit, a witness from the Holy Ghost that certain concepts are true.

A testimony is the sure knowledge or assurance from the Holy Ghost of the truth and divinity of the Lord’s work in these latter days. A testimony is the “abiding, living, [and] moving *conviction* of the truths revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Marion G. Romney, “How to Gain a Testimony,” *New Era*, May 1976, 8; italics added).

When we bear testimony, we declare the absolute truth of the gospel message. In a time when many perceive truth as relative, a declaration of absolute truth is not very popular, nor does it seem politically correct or opportune. Testimonies of things how “they really are” (Jacob 4:13) are bold, true, and vital because they have eternal consequences for mankind. Satan wouldn’t mind if we declared the message of our faith and gospel doctrine as negotiable according to circumstances. Our firm conviction of gospel truth is an anchor in our lives; it is steady and reliable as the North Star. A testimony is very personal and may be a little different for each of us, because everyone is a unique person. However, a testimony of the restored

gospel of Jesus Christ will always include these clear and simple truths:

- God lives. He is our loving Father in Heaven, and we are His children.
- Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and the Savior of the world.
- Joseph Smith is the prophet of God through whom the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored in the latter days.
- The Book of Mormon is the word of God.

• President Gordon B. Hinckley, his counselors, and the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are the prophets, seers, and revelators in our day.

As we acquire a deeper knowledge of these truths and of the plan of salvation by the power and the gift of the Holy Ghost, we can come to “know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5).

Receiving a testimony

How do we get a testimony? We all know that it is easier to talk about a testimony than to acquire one. The process to receive one is based on the law of the harvest: “For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). No good thing comes without effort and sacrifice. If we have to work hard to obtain a testimony, it will make us and our testimony even stronger. And if we share our testimony, it will grow.

A testimony is a most precious possession because it is not acquired by logic or reason alone, it cannot be purchased with earthly possessions, and it cannot be given as a present or inherited from our ancestors. We cannot depend on the testimonies of other people. We need to know for ourselves. President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “Every Latter-day Saint has the responsibility to know for himself or herself with a certainty beyond doubt that Jesus is the resurrected, living Son of the living God” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1983, 110; or *Ensign*, May 1983, 80).

The source of this sure knowledge and firm conviction is divine revelation, “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

We receive this testimony when the Holy Spirit speaks to the spirit within us. We will receive a calm and unwavering certainty that will be the source of our testimony and conviction irrespective of our culture, race, language, or socioeconomic background. These promptings of the Spirit, rather than human logic alone, will be the true foundation upon which our testimony will be built.

The core of this testimony will always be the faith in and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His divine mission, who in the scriptures says of Himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

So how do we receive a personal testimony rooted in the witness of the Holy Ghost? The pattern is outlined in the scriptures:

First: Desire to believe. The Book of Mormon encourages us: “If [you] will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, . . . even if [you] can no more than desire to believe” (Alma 32:27).

Some may say, “I cannot believe; I am not a religious person.” Just consider, God promises us divine help even if we have only a desire to believe, but it has to be a true and not a pretended desire.

Second: Search the scriptures. Have questions; study them out; search in the scriptures for answers. Again, the Book of Mormon has good advice for us: “If [you] give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart” through diligent study of the word of God, the good seed “will begin to swell within your breasts” if you will not resist with unbelief. This good seed will “enlarge [your] soul” and “enlighten [your] understanding” (Alma 32:28).

Third: Do the will of God; keep the commandments. It is not enough to enter

into a scholarly debate if we want to know for ourselves that the kingdom of God has been restored upon the earth. Casual study is also not enough. We have to get in on the action ourselves, and that means learning and then doing God’s will.

We need to come to Christ and follow His teachings. The Savior taught: “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man *will do his will*, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:16–17; italics added). And He said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Fourth: Ponder, fast, and pray. To receive knowledge from the Holy Ghost, we must ask Heavenly Father for it. We must trust that God loves us and that He will help us to recognize the promptings of the Holy Ghost. The Book of Mormon reminds us:

“When [you] . . . read these things, . . . remember how merciful the Lord [has] been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that [you] shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

“ . . . Ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are . . . true; and if [you] . . . ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:3–4).

And the prophet Alma said:

“I testify unto you that I do know that these things . . . are true. And how do [you] suppose that I know of their surety?

“ . . . Behold, I have fasted and prayed . . . that I might know these things of myself. And . . . the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation” (Alma 5:45–46).

My dear brothers and sisters, Alma received his witness by fasting and prayer

more than 2,000 years ago, and we may have the same sacred experience today.

Blessings of having a testimony

What is a testimony good for? A testimony provides proper perspective, motivation, and a solid foundation on which to build a life of purpose and personal growth. It is a constant source of confidence, a true and faithful companion during good times and bad. A testimony provides us with a reason for hope and gladness. It helps us cultivate a spirit of optimism and happiness and enables us to rejoice in the beauties of nature. A testimony motivates us to choose the right at all times and in all circumstances. It motivates us to draw nearer to God, allowing Him to draw nearer to us (see James 4:8).

Our personal testimony is a protective shield, and like an iron rod it is guiding us safely through darkness and confusion.

Nephi's testimony gave him the courage to stand up and be counted as one who obeys the Lord. He did not murmur, doubt, or fear, no matter what the circumstances. When times got tough he said, "I will go and do [what] the Lord [has] commanded, for I know that the Lord . . . shall prepare a way . . . [to] accomplish [it]" (1 Nephi 3:7).

Just as the Lord knew Nephi, God knows us and loves us. This is our time; these are our days. We are where the action is. Our firm personal testimony will motivate us to change ourselves and then bless the world. Of this I testify and leave you my blessing as an Apostle of the Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting, which will commence in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 p.m. mountain daylight time.

The nationwide Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 a.m. mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will immediately follow.

We thank the choir from the Provo Missionary Training Center for the beautiful music they have provided this afternoon and for the beautiful spirit they bring with them.

Our concluding speaker at this session will be Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Following his remarks, the choir will sing "Hark, All Ye Nations!" The benediction will then be offered by Elder Gene R. Cook of the Seventy.

Elder Richard G. Scott

Enjoying peace and happiness

Our Father in Heaven wants each of us to enjoy peace and happiness in mortal life. Our Master, Jesus Christ, and His prophets have taught how to have that peace and happiness, even in a world that is ever more challenging, with increasing conflict and an intense concentration of alluring temptations.

Rock-climbing analogy

I will illustrate the wrong way to find peace and happiness, and then the proper way, by using an analogy to rock climbing. There are those who attempt to scale a difficult rock cliff by a method called "soloing." They ascend alone, without equipment, companions, or any secure protection. They depend on their own

skill and capacity. They do it for the thrill of living on the edge with high risk. It is done despite the probability that, in time, they will fall and be seriously injured or lose their life. They are like many who face the challenges and temptations of life without the security of following the commandments of God, guided by the Holy Spirit. In today's difficult world they will almost surely violate critical laws, with painful, destructive consequences. Do not "solo" in life. You will almost certainly fall into transgression.

There is a safer way to rock climb. When a pair of climbers tackle a difficult ascent, the leader scales a wall, placing anchors a few feet apart. His or her rope is linked to the anchor by a carabiner. Safety is assured by a companion, called the second, stationed in a very solid position. The lead is protected as the second belays—that is, carefully controls how the rope is paid out. In this way the lead is assured protection while ascending. Should there be an inadvertent misstep, the anchor will safely limit the fall. The second not only secures the lead but gives encouragement with comments and signals as they communicate back and forth. Their goal is a safe, exhilarating experience by overcoming a significant challenge. They employ techniques and equipment that are tried and proven. The essential equipment includes a secure harness, a reliable rope, a variety of anchors to be fixed to the rock face, a chalk bag to improve grip, and proper boots or special shoes that a leader can use to grip the surface of the steep wall.

The companionship has studied the rules and techniques of rock climbing. They have received instruction from experienced climbers and have practiced to become comfortable with the proper moves and the use of equipment. They have planned a route and determined how they will work together. When the leader scales far enough and finds a convenient place that is very safe, he or she belays while tak-

ing up the rope as the second follows the "pitch," or length of rope that has been extended. When the leader is reached, the process is then repeated. One belays while the other climbs, inserting anchors every few feet as protection should there be an inadvertent fall. While technical rock climbing appears to be risky and dangerous, these precautions assure an exhilarating experience, safely accomplished by following correct principles.

The commandments are our anchors

In real life, the anchors are the laws of God that provide protection under all of the challenges that you will face. The rope and carabiners that secure the rope to the anchors represent obedience to those commandments. When you learn those commandments, continue to practice them, and have a plan to avoid danger, you will have a secure means of obtaining protection against Satan's temptations. You will develop strength of character that will fortify you against transgression. Should you make a wrong move, there need be no enduring problem, because of the belaying, or help, that is available through your repentance.

Centering our lives in Jesus Christ

Let the Savior be your "lead" in life. He has said, "I am . . . the Rock of Heaven . . . ; whoso cometh in at the gate and climbeth up by me shall never fall."¹ The Redeemer will safely lead you over the most difficult obstacles of life. His laws are absolutely secure anchors of protection that dispel fear and assure success in an otherwise dangerous world. Such a life will certainly provide you peace and happiness.

True, enduring happiness, with the accompanying strength, courage, and capacity to overcome the greatest difficulties, will come as you center your life in Jesus Christ. Obedience to His teachings

provides a secure ascent in the journey of life. That takes effort. While there is no guarantee of overnight results, there is the assurance that, in the Lord's time, solutions will come, peace will prevail, and happiness will be yours.

The challenges you face, the growth experiences you encounter, are intended to be temporary scenes played out on the stage of a life of continuing peace and happiness. Sadness, heartache, and disappointment are events in life. It is not intended that they be the substance of life. I do not minimize how hard some of these events can be. When the lesson you are to learn is very important, trials can extend over a long period of time, but they should not be allowed to become the confining focus of everything you do. Your life can and should be wondrously rewarding. It is your understanding and application of the laws of God that will give your life glorious purpose as you ascend and conquer the difficulties of life. That perspective keeps challenges confined to their proper place—stepping-stones to further growth and attainment.

The Lord is intent on your personal growth and development. Your progress is accelerated when you willingly allow Him to lead you through every growth experience you encounter, whether you welcome the experience or not. Trust in the Lord. Ask to be led by the Spirit to know His will. Be willing to accept it. You will then qualify for the greatest happiness and the heights of attainment from this mortal experience.

Atonement makes happiness possible

Peace and happiness are the precious fruits of a righteous life. They are only possible because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I will explain.

Each of us makes mistakes in life. They result in broken eternal laws. Justice is that part of Father in Heaven's plan of

happiness that maintains order. It is like gravity to a rock climber, ever present. It is a friend if eternal laws are observed. It responds to your detriment if they are ignored. Justice guarantees that you will receive the blessings you earn for obeying the laws of God. Justice also requires that every broken law be satisfied. When you obey the laws of God, you are blessed, but there is no additional credit earned that can be saved to satisfy the laws that you break. If not resolved, broken laws can cause your life to be miserable and would keep you from returning to God. Only the life, teachings, and particularly the Atonement of Jesus Christ can release you from this otherwise impossible predicament.

The demands of justice for broken law can be satisfied through mercy, earned by your continual repentance and obedience to the laws of God. Such repentance and obedience are absolutely essential for the Atonement to work its complete miracle in your life. The Redeemer can settle your individual account with justice and grant forgiveness through the merciful path of your repentance. Through the Atonement you can live in a world where justice assures that you will retain what you earn by obedience. Through His mercy you can resolve the consequences of broken laws.

Eternal significance of the Atonement

The Atonement was a selfless act of infinite, eternal consequence, arduously earned alone, by the Son of God.² Through it the Savior broke the bonds of death. It justifies our finally being judged by the Redeemer. It can prevent an eternity under the dominion of Satan. It opens the gates to exaltation for all who qualify for forgiveness through repentance and obedience.

Pondering the grandeur of the Atonement evokes the most profound feelings of awe, immense gratitude, and deep humility. Those impressions can provide you powerful motivation to keep His com-

mandments and consistently repent of errors for greater peace and happiness.

I believe that no matter how diligently you try, you cannot with your human mind fully comprehend the eternal significance of the Atonement nor fully understand how it was accomplished. We can only appreciate in the smallest measure what it cost the Savior in pain, anguish, and suffering or how difficult it was for our Father in Heaven to see His Son experience the incomparable challenge of His Atonement. Even so, you should conscientiously study the Atonement to understand it as well as you can. You can learn what is needful to live His commandments, to enjoy peace and happiness in mortal life. You can qualify, with obedient family members, to live with Him and your Father in Heaven forever.

Merits, mercy, and grace of the Savior

Lehi taught his son Jacob, “No flesh . . . can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the *merits*, and *mercy*, and *grace* of the Holy Messiah.”³

Jesus Christ possessed *merits* that no other being could possibly have. He was a God, Jehovah, before His birth in Bethlehem. His beloved Father not only gave Him His spirit body, but Jesus was His Only Begotten Son in the flesh. Our Master lived a perfect, sinless life and therefore was free from the demands of justice.

He is perfect in every attribute, including love, compassion, patience, obedience, forgiveness, and humility. His *mercy* pays our debt to justice when we repent and obey Him. Since with even our best efforts to obey His teachings we will still fall short, because of His *grace* we will be “saved, after all we can do.”⁴

I testify that with unimaginable suffering and agony at an incalculable price, the Savior earned His right to be our Redeemer, our Intermediary, our Final Judge. I know that He lives and that He loves you. Consistently make Him your “lead” in life. The secure anchors of His laws will assure safety and success as you scale the challenges you will face. You will not fall into serious transgression. Yours will be a life of peace and happiness crowned with exaltation in the celestial kingdom. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Moses 7:53.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 133:50, 52–53.
3. 2 Nephi 2:8; italics added.
4. 2 Nephi 25:23.

The choir sang “Hark, All Ye Nations!”

Elder Gene R. Cook offered the benediction.

GENERAL PRIESTHOOD SESSION

The general priesthood session, the third session of the 176th Semiannual General Conference, convened in the Conference Center at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, September 30, 2006. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by a Melchizedek Priesthood choir from Brigham City, Utah. N. Geoffrey Anderson directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen was the organist.

President Monson opened the meeting with the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you, brethren, to the general priesthood session of the 176th Semi-annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

These services are being relayed by satellite transmission to holders of the priesthood gathered in the Assembly Hall, the BYU Marriott Center, the Provo Missionary Training Center, and in other locations in many countries throughout the world.

The singing during this session will be furnished by a Melchizedek Priesthood choir from Brigham City, under the direction of N. Geoffrey Anderson, with Clay Christiansen at the organ.

We shall begin this priesthood session with the choir singing “See, the Mighty Angel Flying.” The invocation will then be

offered by Elder Clate W. Mask Jr. of the Seventy.

The choir sang “See, the Mighty Angel Flying.”

Elder Clate W. Mask Jr. offered the invocation.

President Monson

The choir will now sing “Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah.” Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will then address us. He will be followed by Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Presidency of the Seventy, after which we shall hear from Elders Marcus B. Nash and Stanley G. Ellis of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah.”

Elder Henry B. Eyring

Strength of priesthood quorums

I am grateful to be with you in this great priesthood meeting. All of us are members of a quorum in the priesthood. That may not seem remarkable to you, but it does to me. I was ordained a deacon in the Aaronic Priesthood in a tiny branch of the Church. There was only one family in the branch. We had no chapel. We met in our house. I was the only deacon and my brother the only teacher.

So I know what it is like to exercise the priesthood alone, without serving with others in a quorum. I was content in that small branch without a quorum. I had no way to know what I was missing. And then my family moved across a continent to where there were many priesthood holders and strong quorums.

I have learned over the years that the strength in a quorum doesn’t come from the number of priesthood holders in it. Nor does it come automatically from the age and maturity of the members. Rather, the strength of a quorum comes in large measure from how completely its members are united in righteousness. That unity in a strong quorum of the priesthood is not like anything I have experienced in an athletic team or club or any other organization in the world.

The words of Alma, recorded in the book of Mosiah, come closest to describing the unity I have felt in the strongest priesthood quorums:

“And he commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism,

having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another.”¹

Alma even told his people how to qualify for that unity. He told them “that they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed his people.”²

What Alma was teaching, and what is true in any unified priesthood quorum I have seen, is that the members’ hearts are being changed through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. That is how their hearts become knit together.

Taught according to the covenants

You can see, then, why the Lord charges the presidents of quorums to lead in the way that He does. In the 107th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, He uses almost the same words describing the duties of the president in each quorum. The deacons quorum president is to teach the quorum members their duty “as it is given according to the covenants.”³ The president of the teachers quorum is to teach its members their duties “as given in the covenants.”⁴ The president of the priests quorum, who is the bishop, is commanded “to preside over forty-eight priests, and sit in council with them, to teach them the duties of their office, as is given in the covenants.”⁵

The elders quorum president is charged this way:

“Again, the duty of the president over the office of elders is to preside over ninety-six elders, and to sit in council with them, and to teach them according to the covenants.”⁶

It is easy to understand why God wants His quorums taught “according to the covenants.” Covenants are solemn promises. Heavenly Father has promised us all eternal life if we will make and keep covenants. For instance, we receive the priesthood with a covenant to be faithful in helping Him in His work. The people we baptize into His Church promise to

have faith in Jesus Christ and to repent and to keep His commandments. Every covenant requires faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His commandments to qualify for the forgiveness and purified hearts necessary to inherit eternal life, the greatest of all the gifts of God.

A desire to bring the Spirit to others

You might ask, “Does that mean that every lesson in the quorum must only be about faith and repentance?” Of course not. But it does mean that the teacher and those who participate must always desire to bring the Spirit of the Lord into the hearts of the members in the room to produce faith and a determination to repent and to be clean.

And that desire goes beyond the walls of the room where the quorum meets. In a truly united quorum, that desire extends to the members wherever they are.

I saw that a few years ago in a deacons quorum where I had been called to teach the lessons. A few of the deacons failed to come to the quorum meetings from time to time. I knew that the teaching in that quorum—and in every quorum—was the charge of the president, who had keys. He was to sit in council with all of them. And so I have made a habit of seeking the counsel of the one with the charge from God by asking him, “What do you think I should teach? What should I try to accomplish?”

I learned to follow his counsel because I knew God had given him responsibility for the teaching of his quorum members. I knew one Sunday that God had honored the charge to a young quorum president. I was teaching the deacons. I noticed an empty chair. There was a recording device sitting on the chair, and I could see that it was running. After the class, a boy sitting next to the empty chair picked up the recorder. As he started to leave the room, I asked him why he had recorded our discussion. He

smiled and said that another deacon had told him that he wouldn't be in the quorum that day. He was taking the recorder to his friend at home so that he could listen to our lesson.

I had trusted in the responsibility given to a young quorum president, so help from heaven came. The Spirit came to touch the members in that room and sent one of them to a friend to try to strengthen his faith and lead him to repentance. The deacon carrying the recorder had learned according to the covenants, and he reached out to help his friend and fellow member in the quorum.

Quorums are service units

Priesthood quorum members are taught in more ways than by lessons in a class. The quorum is a service unit, and the members learn in their service. A quorum can give greater service than the members could give alone. And that power is multiplied by more than their numbers. Every quorum has a leader with authority and responsibility to direct priesthood service. I have seen the power that comes when quorums are called to move out to help in times of disaster. Time and again I have had people outside the Church express surprise and admiration for the effectiveness of the Church in organizing to give help. It seems to them like a miracle. In all priesthood service the miracle of power comes because leaders and members honor the authority of those who direct the service in priesthood quorums across the earth.

Miracles of power can come as quorums reach out to serve others. They come as well when the priesthood service is to members within the quorum. A deacons quorum president met early one Sunday, before the quorum meeting, with his counselors and with the quorum secretary. After prayerful consideration in council, he felt inspired to call a deacon to invite to the next quorum meeting another deacon who had never attended. He

knew that the deacon who had never attended had a father who was not a member of the Church and that his mother had little interest in the Church.

The designated deacon accepted the call from his president to contact the boy. He went. I watched him go. He went a little reluctantly, as if it might be a hard task. The boy he invited to come with him to quorum came only a few times before his family moved away. Many years later I was in a stake conference thousands of miles away from where that deacons quorum had met. Between conference meetings, a man I did not know came up to me and asked if I knew someone. He gave me a name. It was the boy who was called by his deacons quorum president to go after and care for one lost sheep. The man said to me, "Will you thank him for me? I am the grandfather of the boy he invited to a deacons quorum years ago. He is grown now. But he still talks with me about the deacon who invited him to go with him to church."

He had tears in his eyes, and so did I. A young quorum president had been inspired to reach out to a lost member of his quorum. He was inspired to send a boy on the errand to serve. That president had done what the Master would have done. And in the process a young president trained a new priesthood holder in his duty to serve others according to the covenants. Hearts were knit which were still connected after more than 20 years and across thousands of miles. Quorum unity lasts when it is forged in the Lord's service and in the Lord's way.

Building fellowship

One of the hallmarks of a strong quorum is the feeling of fellowship among its members. They care for each other. They help each other. Quorum presidents can build that fellowship best if they remember the Lord's purpose for unity in the quorum. It is of course so that they will help each other. But it is more, much

more. It is so that they will lift and encourage each other to serve in righteousness with the Master in His work to offer eternal life to Heavenly Father's children.

Understanding that will change the way we try to build fellowship in the quorum. For instance, it might even change the way a teachers quorum plays basketball. The members might hope to build fellowship more than just to win a game. They could choose to invite a boy who is always left out because he doesn't play very well. If he accepts and comes, the members of the quorum are likely to pass the ball a little more, looking for the open man, especially the boy who isn't likely to score. Twenty years later they may not remember whether they won that night, but they will always remember how they played together and why—and whose team it was. It was the Lord who said, "If ye are not one ye are not mine."⁷

Understanding why the Lord wants fellowship can change the way an elders quorum party is planned. I've been to a party where the man who planned it was a convert to the Church. Finding the gospel was the sweetest thing that had ever happened to him. So neighbors and friends not yet members of the Church were invited to the party. I still remember the feeling of fellowship as we visited with them about what the Church meant to us. I felt in that party more than fellowship with brothers in the priesthood. The Master invited His disciples to His first Quorum of the Twelve in His mortal ministry this way: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."⁸ And so that night at a party, I felt that I was in the fellowship of the Master and His disciples, becoming what He wants us to be.

I was blessed with that same feeling of fellowship by a priesthood leader when I was in the Aaronic Priesthood. He understood how to build priesthood fellowship that can last. He arranged with the owner of a woodlot for us to spend an afternoon chopping wood and putting it in bundles. The bundles were for widows so that they

could have a fire in the cold of winter. I still remember the warmth of fellowship I felt with my priesthood brethren. But even more I remember feeling that I was doing what the Savior would do. And so I felt fellowship with Him. We can build that precious fellowship in our quorums in this life, and then we can have it forever, in glory and in families, if we live according to the covenants.

Becoming united quorums

My prayer is that you will accept the Lord's invitation to become united, as one, in our quorums of the priesthood. He has marked the way. And He has promised us that with His help good quorums can become great quorums. He wants that for us. And I know that He needs stronger quorums to bless the children of our Heavenly Father, according to the covenants. I have faith that He will.

I know that our Heavenly Father lives. I know that His Son, Jesus Christ, atoned for our sins and those of everyone we will ever meet. He was resurrected. He lives. He leads His Church. He holds the keys of the priesthood. Through inspiration to those who hold keys in the Church, He calls every president of every priesthood quorum. I testify that the priesthood was restored with all its keys to Joseph Smith. And I bear solemn witness that those keys have been passed to the present day to the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who is the president of the priesthood in all the earth.

I so testify, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Mosiah 18:21.
2. Mosiah 18:20.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 107:85.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 107:86.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 107:87.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 107:89.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
8. Matthew 4:19.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

A father's sacrifice

Years ago, when my brothers and I were boys, our mother had radical cancer surgery. She came very close to death. Much of the tissue in her neck and shoulder had to be removed, and for a long time it was very painful for her to use her right arm.

One morning about a year after the surgery, my father took Mother to an appliance store and asked the manager to show her how to use a machine he had for ironing clothes. The machine was called an Ironrite. It was operated from a chair by pressing pedals with one's knees to lower a padded roller against a heated metal surface and turn the roller, feeding in shirts, pants, dresses, and other articles. You can see that this would make ironing (of which there was a great deal in our family of five boys) much easier, especially for a woman with limited use of her arm. Mother was shocked when Dad told the manager they would buy the machine and then paid cash for it. Despite my father's good income as a veterinarian, Mother's surgery and medications had left them in a difficult financial situation.

On the way home, my mother was upset: "How can we afford it? Where did the money come from? How will we get along now?" Finally Dad told her that he had gone without lunches for nearly a year to save enough money. "Now when you iron," he said, "you won't have to stop and go into the bedroom and cry until the pain in your arm stops." She didn't know he knew about that. I was not aware of my father's sacrifice and act of love for my mother at the time, but now that I know, I say to myself, "There is a man."

"Arise . . . and be men"

The prophet Lehi pled with his rebellious sons, saying, "Arise from the dust,

my sons, *and be men*" (2 Nephi 1:21; italics added). By age, Laman and Lemuel were men, but in terms of character and spiritual maturity, they were still as children. They murmured and complained if asked to do anything hard. They didn't accept anyone's authority to correct them. They didn't value spiritual things. They easily resorted to violence, and they were good at playing the victim.

We see some of the same attitudes today. Some act as if a man's highest goal should be his own pleasure. Permissive social mores have "let men off the hook," as it were, so that many think it acceptable to father children out of wedlock and to cohabit rather than marry.¹ Dodging commitments is considered smart, but sacrificing for the good of others, naive. For some, a life of work and achievement is optional. A psychologist studying the growing phenomenon of what he calls "young men stuck in neutral" describes this scenario:

"Justin goes off to college for a year or two, wastes thousands of dollars of his parents' money, then gets bored and comes home to take up residence in his old room, the same bedroom where he lived when he was in high school. Now he's working 16 hours a week at Kinko's or part time at Starbucks.

"His parents are pulling their hair out. 'Justin, you're 26 years old. You're not in school. You don't have a career. You don't even have a girlfriend. What's the plan? When are you going to get a life?'"

" 'What's the problem?' Justin asks. 'I haven't gotten arrested for anything, I haven't asked you guys for money. Why can't you just chill?' "²

How's that for ambition?

We who hold the priesthood of God cannot afford to drift. We have work to do (see Moroni 9:6). We must arise from the dust of self-indulgence and be men! It

is a wonderful aspiration for a boy to become a man—strong and capable; someone who can build and create things, run things; someone who makes a difference in the world. It is a wonderful aspiration for those of us who are older to make the vision of true manhood a reality in our lives and be models for those who look to us for an example.

Relationship to women

In large measure, true manhood is defined in our relationship to women. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have given us the ideal to pursue in these words:

“The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. . . . By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.”³

Over the years, I have visited members of the Church in many countries, and despite differences in circumstances and cultures, everywhere I have been impressed with the faith and capacity of our women, including some of the very young. So many of them possess a remarkable faith and goodness. They know the scriptures. They are poised and confident. I ask myself, Do we have men to match these women? Are our young men developing into worthy companions that such women can look up to and respect?

President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking in this meeting in April 1998, gave specific counsel for young men:

“The girl you marry will take a terrible chance on you. . . . [You] will largely determine the remainder of her life. . . .

“Work for an education. Get all the training that you can. The world will largely pay you what it thinks you are worth. Paul did not mince words when he wrote to Timothy, ‘But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel’ (1 Timothy 5:8).”⁴

Importance of integrity

Integrity is fundamental to being men. Integrity means being truthful, but it also means accepting responsibility and honoring commitments and covenants. President N. Eldon Tanner, a former counselor in the First Presidency and a man of integrity, told of someone who sought his advice:

“A young man came to me not long ago and said, ‘I made an agreement with a man that requires me to make certain payments each year. I am in arrears, and I can’t make those payments, for if I do, it is going to cause me to lose my home. What shall I do?’

“I looked at him and said, ‘Keep your agreement.’

“‘Even if it costs me my home?’

“I said, ‘I am not talking about your home. I am talking about your agreement; and I think your wife would rather have a husband who would keep his word, meet his obligations, . . . and have to rent a home than to have a home with a husband who will not keep his covenants and his pledges.’”⁵

Good men sometimes make mistakes. A man of integrity will honestly face and correct his mistakes, and that is an example we can respect. Sometimes men try but fail. Not all worthy objectives are realized, despite one’s honest and best efforts. True manhood is not always measured by the fruits of one’s labors but by the labors themselves—by one’s striving.⁶

Though he will make some sacrifices and deny himself some pleasures in the

course of honoring his commitments, the true man leads a rewarding life. He gives much, but he receives more, and he lives content in the approval of his Heavenly Father. The life of true manhood is the good life.

Jesus Christ as ideal of manhood

Most importantly, when we consider the admonition to be men, we must think of Jesus Christ. When Pilate brought Jesus forth wearing a crown of thorns, he declared, “Behold the man!” (see John 19:4–5). Pilate may not have fully understood the significance of his own words, but the Lord indeed stood before the people then as He stands today—the highest ideal of manhood. Behold the man!

The Lord asked His disciples what manner of men they should be and then answered, “Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27; see also 3 Nephi 18:24). That is our ultimate quest. What did He do that we can emulate as men?

Jesus rejected temptation. When confronted by the great tempter himself, Jesus “[yielded] not to the temptation” (Mosiah 15:5). He countered with scripture: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Gospel commandments and standards are our protection also, and like the Savior, we may draw strength from the scriptures to resist temptation.

The Savior was obedient. He forsook completely the “natural man” (Mosiah 3:19) and yielded His will to the Father (see Mosiah 15:7). He was baptized to show “that, according to the flesh he humbled himself before the Father, and wittenesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” (2 Nephi 31:7).

Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He employed the divine powers of the holy priesthood to bless those in need, “such as healing the sick, raising the dead,

causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases” (Mosiah 3:5). Jesus told His Apostles: “Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:44–45). As His fellow servants, we may become great in His kingdom through love and service.

The Savior was fearless in opposing evil and error. “Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple . . . and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matthew 21:12–13). He called upon all to repent (see Matthew 4:17) and be forgiven (see John 8:11; Alma 5:33). So might we stand firm in defending sacred things and in raising the warning voice.

He gave His life to redeem mankind. Surely we can accept responsibility for those He entrusts to our care.

Brethren, let us be men, even as He is. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See, for example, James E. Faust, “Challenges Facing the Family,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 1–2; Eduardo Porter and Michelle O’Donnell, “Middle-Aged, No Degree, No Wife,” *New York Times*, published in *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Aug. 6, 2006, p. A7; Peg Tyre, “The Trouble with Boys,” *Newsweek*, Jan. 30, 2006, 44–51.
2. Leonard Sax, “Project Aims to Study Young Men Stuck in Neutral,” *Washington Post*, published in *Deseret Morning News*, Apr. 3, 2006, p. A13. “According to the Census Bureau, fully one-third of young men ages 22 to 34 [in the U.S.] are still living at home with their parents—a roughly 100 percent increase in the past 20 years.”
3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.

4. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 66, 68; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 49, 50.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 99; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1966, 1137.
6. In the late 1830s, after the Saints had abandoned Kirtland, the Lord called a man named Oliver Granger to go back and try to settle some unfinished matters for the First Presidency. In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord said:

“Therefore, let [Oliver Granger] contend earnestly for the redemption of the First Presidency of my Church, saith the Lord; and when he falls he shall rise again, *for his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord.* . . . Therefore let no man despise my servant Oliver Granger, but let the blessings of my people be on him forever and ever” (D&C 117:13, 15; italics added).

Elder Marcus B. Nash

Fishing experience as a young man

When I was a deacon like many of you young men, my father and I hiked to a mountain stream to fish for trout. As my dad attached the bait to the hook on the end of my fishing line, he told me that I would need to set the hook in the fish’s mouth when it tried to take the bait, or it would get away. I did not understand what it meant to set the hook, so he explained to me that the hook needed to be embedded in the fish’s mouth when it struck at the bait so it could not shake the hook loose and that the hook would be set if I quickly pulled back on the pole when the fish tried to take the bait.

Now, I really wanted to catch a fish, so I stood on the bank of that mountain stream like a coiled spring, every muscle taut, waiting for the telltale movement at the end of my pole which would signal that the fish was trying to take the bait. After a few minutes I noticed movement at the end of my pole, and in that instant I jerked back on the pole with all of my strength, expecting a big fight with the fish. To my surprise, I watched as that poor trout—with the hook now set very firmly in his mouth—was launched from the water into the air over my head and landed on the ground flopping behind me.

I have two observations from that experience: First, a fish out of water is miserable. Although its gills, fins, and tail

work very well in water, they are all but useless on land. Second, the unfortunate fish I caught that day perished because it was deceived into treating something very dangerous—even fatal—as worthwhile or at least as sufficiently intriguing to warrant a closer look and perhaps a nibble.

To be truly happy, we need the gospel

My dear brethren of the Aaronic Priesthood, there are a couple of lessons to be learned from this: First, a basic purpose of your life, as Lehi taught, is to “have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). In order to have joy, you need to understand that, as a child of your Heavenly Father, you inherited divine traits and spiritual needs—and just like a fish needs water, you need the gospel and the companionship of the Holy Ghost to be truly, deeply happy. Because you are the offspring of God (see Acts 17:28), it is incompatible with your eternal nature to do wrong and feel right. It cannot be done. It is part of your spiritual DNA, as it were, that peace, joy, and happiness will be yours only to the degree you live the gospel.

In contrast, to the degree that you choose not to live the gospel, you will be as miserable as a fish out of water (see Mosiah 4:30). As Alma stated to his son Corianton:

“Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.

“And now, my son, all men that are . . . in a carnal state . . . are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:10–11).

Note that to be without God in the world—in other words, to refuse to live His gospel and therefore lack the companionship of the Spirit—is to be in a state contrary to the nature of happiness. The gospel of Jesus Christ is, in fact, *the*—note that this is singular, meaning it is *the only*—“great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). If you opt for any other way of life or try to live only the parts of the gospel that seem convenient, such a choice will cheat you of the full, resplendent joy and happiness for which you were designed by our loving Father in Heaven and His Son.

Avoiding unclean and evil things

Now to the second lesson from my fishing experience: just as a fish in a mountain stream must be careful of the lures placed in its path to avoid being pulled away from the water, so must you and I be wise in order to avoid being pulled away from a happy, gospel-centered life. Remember that, as Lehi observed, the devil “seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” and obtains “power to captivate” (2 Nephi 2:27, 29) us when we involve ourselves in unclean and evil things. Thus, do not be deceived into even nibbling at unworthy things, for Satan stands ready to set the hook. It was the very real risk of the hook being set subtly or suddenly that led the ancient prophet Moroni—who actually saw our day (see Mormon 8:35)—to pointedly warn you and me to “*touch* not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” (Moroni 10:30; italics added).

There is much that is evil and unclean in music, the Internet, movies, magazines, and in alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. As to any evil and unclean thing, my young

friends, do not even touch it! Disguised in such things is a hook that sets subtly and much more suddenly than you dare think—and it can be an excruciatingly painful process to extract the hook. Alma described that for him the process of repentance was “nigh unto death” (Mosiah 27:28); indeed, he stated that “nothing [could be] so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains” (Alma 36:21).

Making changes through repentance

There may be some of you who have been involved with that which is evil or unclean. Take hope in the doctrinal and historical fact that Alma’s faith in the Lord led him to repent, and as a direct result of his repentance he experienced such happiness through the power of the Atonement of Christ that, in his words, “there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:21). Such will be your experience as you seek the Lord through repentance.

Each of us needs to repent to some degree or another. To repent means to make the real changes in your life the Savior desires you to make for your happiness. Repentance is the great enabling principle of the gospel: when your faith in the Lord causes personal change, such action on your part, as Helaman states, “bringeth [you] unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of [your] souls” (Helaman 5:11). As you seek to change, remember that our loving Savior, as Alma states, has “all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 12:15). This is powerful, liberating, hope-filled doctrine!

The Prophet Joseph Smith learned from firsthand experience that the Lord expects us to avoid misery by living His gospel and wants us to understand that we can repent. When he lost the 116 pages of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon translation by giving in to the persuasions

of men, Joseph was miserable. The Lord told him, “You should have been faithful; and [God] would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble” (D&C 3:8). Such is the case for each of you young men: be faithful, and you will be supported by the hand of God. The Prophet was then reminded that—as with each of us—he would be forgiven if he repented. Imagine what joy he felt when he heard the Lord state, “But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen” (D&C 3:10).

An invitation to live the gospel

My invitation to each of you tonight is to live the gospel to be truly happy, avoid evil and the misery it brings, and if you

have become involved with the evil or unclean thing, make the changes the Lord desires of you for your own happiness—and I witness that He will enable you to succeed through His matchless power.

As you accept this invitation, you will reap lasting happiness and build the foundation of your life upon “the rock of our Redeemer,” such that when the shafts of the evil one and the storms of the world assail you, they will, as Helaman taught, have “no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, *a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall*” (Helaman 5:12; italics added). Of the Lord Jesus Christ I bear my ardent witness: He is the Rock, the one sure foundation for happiness and healing. He lives, has all power in heaven and earth, knows your name, and He loves you. In the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Stanley G. Ellis

Power of attorney

Several years ago Sister Ellis and I were called to preside over the Brazil São Paulo North Mission. The call meant that we would be away for three years. Given our family and business situation, we were impressed to keep our home and business in Houston rather than sell them.

As we began to make the necessary arrangements, it became clear we would need to have our lawyer prepare a power of attorney. That is a legal document that gives someone else the authority to do anything in our name. The person with this document could sell our home or other assets, borrow money in our name, spend our money, or even sell our business. The thought of giving someone that much power and authority over our affairs was scary.

We decided to give our power of attorney to a person we trusted, a good friend and partner, who exercised that power and authority very well. He did what we would have done if we were there.

The priesthood is a sacred trust

Brethren, think of what the Lord has given us—His power and authority! The power and authority to act for Him in all things pertaining to His work!

With this priesthood power and, when necessary, the authorization of those with appropriate keys, we can perform the ordinances of salvation in His name: baptize for the remission of sins, confirm and confer the Holy Ghost, confer the priesthood and ordain others to priesthood offices, and perform temple ordinances. In His name we can administer His Church. In

His name we can bless, home teach, and even heal the sick.

What a trust the Lord has placed in us! Think of it, brethren. He trusts us!

Before we received the priesthood, we had already been prepared and proven. We had exercised faith in Jesus Christ, repented, been baptized, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost. The level of experience we brought to our ordination varied. But the divine procedure was the same. We had been prayed about and interviewed by those exercising priesthood keys. We had been sustained by a vote of the Church members of our unit. We were ordained by one with authority and authorization to do so.

The Lord is careful with His priesthood. To exercise His power and authority is a sacred trust.

How wonderful that we have earned the trust of God! He trusts you! He trusts me!

The priesthood is received by covenant

When we receive the priesthood, we do so by covenant. A covenant is a mutual promise. He promises to bless us on certain conditions. We promise to fulfill those conditions. As we do so, the Lord always keeps His word and gives us the blessing. Usually He gives us more than agreed. He is very generous.

When we receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, we receive what is called “the oath and covenant” of the priesthood. We promise the Lord two things, and He promises us two things. We promise to be “faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods” and faithful in “magnifying [our] calling.” He promises that we will be “sanctified by the Spirit.” Then after we are faithful in all things to the end, He promises that “all that my Father hath shall be given [us]” (see D&C 84:33–41).

Directions and warnings

The Lord blesses His children through our priesthood service. To help us be successful in faithfully rendering priesthood service, He gives us directions and warnings. He has done that in the scriptures and continues to guide us through our leaders and through the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

The scriptures contain many passages of direction and warning to holders of the priesthood. One of the best is section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In those few verses the Lord teaches us that the priesthood can only be exercised in righteousness. We should treat others with persuasion, patience, and kindness. He reminds us of the importance of charity and virtue in having the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost.

That section also warns us of those attitudes and actions that will cause us to lose our priesthood power. If we “aspire to the honors of men,” attempt to “cover our sins,” try to “gratify our pride” or “vain ambition,” or seek to “exercise control” over others, we lose the priesthood power (see vv. 35–37). From that point we would be practicing priestcraft. We would have left the service of God and would be putting ourselves in the service of Satan.

It would be good for priesthood holders to restudy Doctrine and Covenants section 121 regularly. It is easy to understand why our modern prophets have emphasized the need for us to maintain our worthiness and have given us *For the Strength of Youth* as a guide to help us.

One reason we must maintain our worthiness is that we never know when we will be called upon to use the priesthood.

When our son Matthew was five, he fell from the top of the high diving board at our neighborhood pool. He hit the concrete deck and suffered a fractured skull and a brain concussion. He was rushed by

a Life Flight helicopter to the Houston Medical Center for emergency treatment. I needed priesthood assistance immediately. Our home teacher and our priesthood leader were both worthy and prepared at that moment. They helped give Matthew a blessing, and he completely recovered.

We must be ready at any time. As we say in Scouting, “Be prepared.”

Surely we want to avoid priestcraft. But the Apostle Paul warned us of another danger. He warned that in our day there will be those “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5).

How can we as priesthood holders have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof? Could it be that we hold the priesthood but do not exercise it? visit our families rather than home teach them? pray for someone in an ordinance or ordination instead of blessing them? do the Lord’s work the best way we know how without first pleading to know and do His will in His way?

Remember the Lord’s counsel to us through Nephi that we “must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place [we] shall pray” (2 Nephi 32:9).

Making a difference

Years ago I was called to serve as a counselor in the Houston Texas North Stake presidency. I was studying the parable of the talents. You remember the story. A man needed to go away, so he entrusted his servants with his goods. One received five talents, another two, and the last received one. Upon his return, he asked for an accounting.

The servant who received five and returned ten, as well as the one who took two and returned four, were declared good and faithful servants. But what caught my attention was the servant who received one,

took care of it, and returned it safely back to his lord. I was surprised by the response of the master: “Thou wicked and slothful servant, . . . take therefore the talent from him, . . . and cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness”! (See Matthew 25:14–30.)

This seemed to be a harsh reaction to one who seemed to be trying to take care of what he was given. But the Spirit taught me this truth—the Lord expects a difference! I knew in that moment that each of us will one day stand before God and give an accounting of our priesthood service and stewardships. Did we make a difference? In my case, was the Houston Texas North Stake better when I was released than when I was called?

Thankfully, the Lord teaches us how to be fruitful, how to make a difference. “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5). If we exercise His priesthood in His way, following the direction that we receive from His servants and His Spirit, we will be good and faithful servants!

My dear brethren of the priesthood, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, lives! He knows us; He loves us. He placed His trust in us by giving us His priesthood power and authority. I am a witness of this truth. May we use His power and authority to do His will in His way is my prayer.

As we hear from President Hinckley, President Monson, and President Faust, I bear my personal witness that each is a prophet, seer, and revelator. I am anxious to hear their counsel. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Thank you, brethren. The choir and congregation will now sing “Rejoice, the Lord Is King!” At the conclusion of the singing, President James E. Faust, Second

Counselor in the First Presidency, will speak to us, after which President Hinckley has asked that I address you.

The choir and congregation sang
“Rejoice, the Lord Is King!”

President James E. Faust

Delivering rock salt

My grandfather used to graze his cattle each summer in the beautiful, lush, high mountain valleys east of our town in central Utah. However, the cattle craved and needed supplemental nutrients from licking rock salt. The rock salt came from a salt mine some distance away. Grandfather replenished the salt at the salt licks by putting a packsaddle on a sturdy horse and filling the packsaddle with rock salt. I called the packhorse Slowpoke for good reason. Grandfather put me on Slowpoke with the saddle loaded with rock salt. He gave me the reins so I could guide the horse up the mountain following Grandfather on his horse.

My horse Slowpoke was slow, but I didn't push him because he carried such a heavy load. It took a full day to ride up the mountain to the salt licks and to unload the rock salt from the pack animal. As the day got warmer, my sweaty legs would sting as they rubbed against the lumps of rock salt in the packsaddle. It was a joy when we crossed a stream and I could get off the horse and get rid of the sting by washing and drying my legs.

Grandfather would sing most of the day. Mostly he sang the songs of Zion. But one song he sang that impressed me greatly was “Show me your companions, and I will tell you what you are.” Looking back on it, taking salt to the mountain valley was an enjoyable experience, while the additional nutrients from the rock salt fortified the cattle.

The need for spiritual nourishment

A nutrient furnishes nourishment that promotes growth and healing both in animals and humans. Grandfather's cattle craved the nutrients in the rock salt, but human beings need something more. They need to be replenished spiritually because “life is more than meat”¹ and “there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.”² The human spirit needs love. It also needs to be “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine.”³

Spiritual nourishment prepares us for baptism. This preparation includes humbling ourselves before God, having “broken hearts and contrite spirits,” repenting of all our sins, being “willing to take upon [us] the name of Jesus Christ,” and manifesting “by [our] works that [we] have received of the Spirit of Christ.”⁴

Our most important spiritual nutrient is a testimony that God is our Eternal Father, that Jesus is our Savior and Redeemer, and that the Holy Ghost is our Comforter. This testimony is confirmed to us by the gift of the Holy Ghost. From this testimony we derive the spiritual nutrients of faith and trust in God, which bring forth the blessings of heaven. Spiritual nutrients come to us from various sources, but because of time constraints I would like to mention just three.

Incorporating scriptures into our lives

A few years ago, a young man who was starting his senior year in high school re-

solved to nourish himself by studying the scriptures for half an hour each day. As he began reading the New Testament, he hit a stumbling block. He didn't feel the anticipated spiritual high, and he wasn't getting any insight. So he asked himself, "What am I doing wrong?" Then an episode at school came into his mind. He and some friends had been sharing jokes—some of which were not so funny, and downright shameful. He not only had joined in but had even added some off-color comments of his own. Just as he thought this, his eye fell on these words in Matthew: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."⁵ He knew that the Spirit had directed him to these words at this time. He turned from his Bible and offered up a prayer of repentance.

The answer to his question "What am I doing wrong?" was simple. He was reading the scriptures, marking the scriptures, and even enjoying the scriptures, but he was not living the counsel given in the scriptures. As he renewed his scripture reading and tried to live by Christ's example, he soon noticed how different areas of his life began to blossom.⁶ By incorporating the scriptures into his life, he had added an important spiritual nutrient.

Selfless service

In our uncertain physical environment, we need to increase our spiritual nutrients—nutrients that come from the knowledge of the fulness of the gospel and the powers of the holy priesthood. When such knowledge penetrates our souls, we not only draw closer to God but we also want to serve Him and our fellowmen.

Some years ago a priests quorum decided to gather food for the needy as a service project. Jim, one of the priests, was excited to participate and was determined to collect more food than anyone else. The time arrived when the priests met at the

chapel. They all went out at the same time and returned at a specified time later in the evening. To everyone's surprise, Jim's cart was empty. He seemed rather sober, and some of the boys made fun of him. Seeing this and knowing that Jim had an interest in cars, the adviser said, "Come outside, Jim. I want you to look at my car. It's giving me some trouble."

When they got outside, the adviser asked Jim if he was upset. Jim said, "No, not really. But when I went out to collect the food, I really got a lot. My cart was full. As I was returning to the chapel, I stopped at the home of a nonmember woman who is divorced and lives within our ward boundaries. I knocked on the door and explained what we were doing, and she invited me in. She began to look for something to give me. She opened the refrigerator, and I could see there was hardly anything in it. The cupboards were bare. Finally, she found a small can of peaches.

"I could hardly believe it. There were all these little kids running around that needed to be fed, and she handed me this can of peaches. I took it and put it in my cart and went on up the street. I got about halfway up the block when I just felt warm all over and knew I needed to go back to that house. I gave her all the food."

The adviser said, "Jim, don't you ever forget the way you feel tonight, because that's what it is all about."⁷ Jim had tasted the nutrient of selfless service.

Missionary work

Many spiritual nutrients come while serving on a mission—from being totally involved in the work of the Master. They come from helping people become spiritually awake so that they can accept the gospel. Over a century ago when Elder J. Golden Kimball presided over the Southern States Mission, he called for a meeting of the elders. They were to meet in a secluded spot in the woods so they would

have privacy. One of the elders had a problem with one of his legs. It was raw and swollen to at least twice the size of his other leg. But the elder insisted on attending this special priesthood meeting in the woods. So two of the elders carried him to this meeting place.

Elder Kimball asked the missionaries, “Brethren, what are you preaching?”

They said, “We are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“Are you telling these people that you have the power and authority, through faith, to heal the sick?” he asked.

They said, “Yes.”

“Well then,” he continued, “why don’t you believe it?”

The young man with the swollen leg spoke up and said, “I believe it.” Here is the rest of the story told in Elder Kimball’s words: “[The elder] sat down on a stump and the elders gathered around him. He was anointed and I administered to him, and he was healed right in their presence. It was quite a shock; and every other elder that was sick was administered to, and they were all healed. We went out of that priesthood meeting and the elders received their appointments, and there was a joy and happiness that cannot be described.”⁸ Their nutrient of faith had been replenished and their zeal for missionary work revived.

Living worthy of guidance

Spiritual nutrients, which keep us spiritually healthy, can lose their potency and strength if we do not live worthy of the divine guidance we need. The Savior has told us: “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”⁹ We need to keep our minds and bodies clean from all forms of addiction and pollution. We would never choose to eat spoiled or contaminated food. In the same selective

way, we should be careful not to read or view anything that is not in good taste. Much of the spiritual pollution that comes into our lives comes through the Internet, computer games, television shows, and movies that are highly suggestive of or graphically portray humanity’s baser attributes. Because we live in such an environment, we need to increase our spiritual strength.

Hungering and thirsting

Enos speaks of his soul hungering and crying all day and also into night in supplication for his soul.¹⁰ He craved the spiritual nutrients that quench the thirst for spiritual truth. As the Savior of the world told the woman at the well in Samaria, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”¹¹

This evening we have met as the priesthood of God in this vast congregation, both seen and unseen, hopefully because we want to be spiritually nourished. I hope that we will always hunger and thirst for the word of the Lord through His servants, the prophets, and that we may be filled each week as we attend our sacrament meetings and renew our covenants.

Each of you young men of the Aaronic Priesthood has inside of you all of the essential elements for your eternal destiny. These elements, some of them dormant, need to be strengthened and nourished from the outside. Some of them are physical; some of them are spiritual. The human spirit needs to know about its eternal journey—to know where it came from, why it is here in mortality, and where it must ultimately go to receive joy and happiness and fulfill its destiny. Replenishing our spirits with spiritual nutrients can be everlasting and will go with us into the eternities. As Amulek taught, “That same spirit which doth possess your bodies

at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.”¹²

Brethren, we appreciate your devotion and righteousness. You carry out your callings in the quorums, branches, wards, and stakes so well that the Church grows, and the whole work of God goes forward throughout the world. Through your priesthood you are able to bless in the name of the Lord your families and others you may be called upon or assigned to bless. This comes from the divine agency entrusted to us by the Lord, for He has promised, “Whomsoever you bless I will bless.”¹³

Brethren, I hope we will be faithful and true to all of our covenants. I pray that we can be totally committed in all of our family relationships, especially to our spouses, but also to our parents, our children, and grandchildren. May we be found bearing our personal testimonies of the

truthfulness of this work all the days of our lives. May we go forward in righteousness as the humble servants of the Lord, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Luke 12:23.
2. Job 32:8.
3. 1 Timothy 4:6.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
5. Matthew 12:36.
6. See Carl Houghton, “What Am I Doing Wrong?” *New Era*, Sept. 1987, 12.
7. See Robert B. Harbertson, “The Aaronic Priesthood: What’s So Great about It,” *New Era*, May 1990, 49.
8. In Max Nolan, “J. Golden Kimball in the South,” *New Era*, July 1985, 10.
9. Matthew 5:13.
10. See Enos 1:4.
11. John 4:14.
12. Alma 34:34.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 132:47.

President Thomas S. Monson

A few weeks ago at a fast and testimony meeting at our ward, I watched a little boy on the back row mustering up courage to bear his testimony. He made three or four false starts and then sat down. Finally it was his turn. He squared his little shoulders, walked bravely up the aisle to the stand, took the two steps up to the level of the pulpit, stepped over and put his hands on the pulpit, gazed into the congregation, smiled—and then turned around, went back off those two steps and down the same aisle to his mother and father. I looked at you tonight in this vast Conference Center and thought of those listening in and could appreciate more fully the actions of that little boy.

Honoring our priesthood duties

My brethren, I am honored by the privilege to speak to you this evening. I

have contemplated what I might say to you. There has come to my mind a favorite scripture from Ecclesiastes: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). I love, I cherish the noble word *duty*.

The legendary General Robert E. Lee of American Civil War fame declared: “Duty is the sublimest word in our language. . . . You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less” (in John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations* [1968], 620).

Each of us has duties associated with the sacred priesthood which we bear. Whether we bear the Aaronic or the Melchizedek Priesthood, much is expected of each of us. The Lord Himself summed up our responsibility when He, in the revelation on the priesthood, urged, “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and

to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence” (D&C 107:99).

I hope with all my heart and soul that every young man who receives the priesthood will honor that priesthood and be true to the trust which is conveyed when it is conferred.

The king’s emerald: a lesson on duty

Fifty-one years ago I heard William J. Critchlow Jr., then president of the South Ogden Stake who would later become an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, speak to the brethren of the general priesthood session of conference and retell a story concerning trust, honor, and duty. May I share the story with you. Its simple lesson applies to us today, as it did then.

“[Young] Rupert stood by the side of the road watching an unusual number of people hurry past. At length he recognized a friend. ‘Where are all of you going in such a hurry?’ he asked.

“The friend paused. ‘Haven’t you heard?’ he said.

“ ‘I’ve heard nothing,’ Rupert answered.

“ ‘Well,’ continued [the] friend, ‘the King has lost his royal emerald! Yesterday he attended a wedding of the nobility and wore the emerald on the slender golden chain around his neck. In some way the emerald became loosened from the chain. Everyone is searching, for the King has offered a reward . . . to the one who finds it. Come, we must hurry.’

“ ‘But I cannot go without asking Grandmother,’ faltered Rupert.

“ ‘Then I cannot wait. I want to find the emerald,’ replied his friend.

“Rupert hurried back to the cabin at the edge of the woods to seek his grandmother’s permission. ‘If I could find it we could leave this hut with its dampness and buy a piece of land up on the hillside,’ he believed with Grandmother.

“But his grandmother shook her head. ‘What would the sheep do?’ she

asked. ‘Already they are restless in the pen, waiting to be taken to the pasture, and please do not forget to take them to water when the sun shines high in the heavens.’

“Sorrowfully, Rupert took the sheep to the pasture, and at noon he led them to the brook in the woods. There he sat on a large stone by the stream. ‘If I could only have had a chance to look for the King’s emerald!’ he thought. Turning his head to gaze down at the sandy bottom of the brook, suddenly he stared into the water. What was it? It could not be! He leaped into the water, and his gripping fingers held something that was green with a slender bit of gold chain [that had been broken]. ‘The King’s emerald!’ he shouted. ‘It must have been flung from the chain when the King [astride his horse galloped across the bridge spanning the stream, and the current carried] it here.’

“With shining eyes Rupert ran to his grandmother’s hut to tell her of his great find. ‘Bless you, my boy,’ she said, ‘but you never would have found it if you had not been doing your duty, herding the sheep.’ And Rupert knew that this was the truth” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1955, 86; paragraphing, capitalization, and punctuation altered).

The lesson to be learned from this story is found in the familiar couplet: “Do [your] duty; that is best; Leave unto [the] Lord the rest!” (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Legend Beautiful,” in *The Complete Poetical Works of Longfellow* [1893], 258).

A leader’s duty does not end

To you who are or have been presidents of your quorums, may I suggest that your duty does not end when your term of office concludes. That relationship with your quorum members, your duty to them, continues throughout your life.

During the time I was a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, I was called to be

president of the quorum. With the urging and assistance of a dedicated and inspired quorum adviser, I worked diligently to ensure that each of the young men attended our meetings regularly. Two of them were a particular challenge, but with our perseverance and love and a little persuasion, they began to attend meetings and participate in quorum activities. However, as time passed and they left the ward to pursue education and employment, each of them drifted back into inactivity.

Over the years I have seen each of these two dear friends at various functions. Whenever I do, I place a hand on their shoulder and remind them, "I'm still your quorum president, and I won't let go. You mean so much to me, and I want you to enjoy the blessings which come with activity in the Church." They know I love them and that I'll never ever give up on them.

Helping a couple return to the Church

For those of us who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, our privilege to magnify our callings is ever present. We are shepherds watching over Israel. The hungry sheep look up, ready to be fed the bread of life.

Many years ago, on a Halloween night, it was my privilege to be of assistance to one who had temporarily lost his way and needed a helping hand to return. I was driving home from the office rather late. I had been stalling on Halloween, letting my wife handle the trick-or-treat visitors. As I passed St. Mark's Hospital in Salt Lake City, I remembered that a dear friend, Max, lay ill in that very hospital. As he and I had become acquainted years before, we discovered that we had grown up in the same ward, although at different times. By the time I was born, Max and his parents had moved from the ward.

That Halloween night, I drove into the parking lot and entered the hospital. As I stopped at the desk to inquire as to

his room number, I was informed that when Max had registered at the hospital, he had listed as his religious preference not LDS but rather another church.

I entered Max's room and greeted him. I told him how proud I was to be his friend and how much I cared about him. I talked about his career in banking and as an orchestra leader on the side. I discovered that he had been offended by a comment or two from others and so had decided to attend another church. I said to him, "Max, you hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. I would like to give you a blessing tonight." He agreed, and the blessing was provided. He then informed me that his wife, Bernice, was also very ill and was, in fact, in an adjoining room. At my invitation, Max joined me in giving a blessing to her. He asked me to help him. I coached him. He anointed his wife. There were tears and embraces all around as I sealed the anointing with Max, his hands on his wife's head with mine, making that Halloween evening one ever to be remembered.

As I left the hospital that night, I stopped at the desk and told the receptionist that with the permission of Max and his wife the record should be changed to reflect their membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I waited and I watched until it was changed.

My friends Max and Bernice are now both on the other side of the veil, but they spent the last period of their lives active and happy and receiving the blessings which come with testimonies of the gospel and attendance at church.

Brethren, our task is to reach out to those who, for whatever reason, are in need of our help. Our challenge is not insurmountable. We are on the Lord's errand, and therefore we are entitled to the Lord's help. But we must try. From the play *Shenandoah* comes the spoken line which inspires: "If we don't try, then we don't do; and if we don't do, then why are we here?"

Our responsibility to be worthy

Ours is the responsibility to so conduct our lives that when the call comes to provide a priesthood blessing or to assist in any way, we are worthy to do so. We have been told that truly we cannot escape the effect of our personal influence. We must be certain that our influence is positive and uplifting.

Are our hands clean? Are our hearts pure? Looking backward in time through the pages of history, we find a lesson on worthiness gleaned from the words of the dying King Darius. Through the proper rites, Darius had been recognized as legitimate king of Egypt. His rival, Alexander the Great, had been declared legitimate son of Amon. He too was Pharaoh. Alexander, finding the defeated Darius on the point of death, laid his hands upon his head to heal him, commanding him to arise and resume his kingly power, concluding, "I swear unto thee, Darius, by all the gods, that I do these things truly and without fakery."

Darius replied with a gentle rebuke: "Alexander, my boy, . . . do you think you can touch heaven with those hands of yours?" (Adapted from Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* [1981], 192.)

Magnifying our priesthood callings

The call of duty can come quietly as we who hold the priesthood respond to the assignments we receive. President George Albert Smith, that modest yet effective leader and eighth President of the Church, declared, "It is your duty first of all to learn what the Lord wants and then by the power and strength of His holy Priesthood to magnify your calling in the presence of your fellows in such a way that the people will be glad to follow you" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 14).

And how does one magnify a calling? Simply by performing the service that pertains to it.

Brethren, it is in *doing*—not just *dreaming*—that lives are blessed, others are guided, and souls are saved. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," declared James (James 1:22).

May all of us assembled tonight in this priesthood meeting make a renewed effort to qualify for the Lord's guidance in our lives. There are so many out there who plead and pray for help. There are those who are discouraged, those who long to return but who don't know how to begin.

I've always believed in the truth of the words "God's sweetest blessings always go by hands that serve him here below" (Whitney Montgomery, "Revelation," in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, ed. Jack M. Lyon and others [1996], 283). Let us have ready hands, clean hands, and willing hearts, that we may participate in providing what our Heavenly Father would have others receive from Him.

Blessing given to a terminally ill friend

I conclude with an example from my own life. I once had a treasured friend who seemed to experience more of life's troubles and frustrations than he could bear. Finally he lay in the hospital terminally ill. I knew not that he was there.

Sister Monson and I had gone to that same hospital to visit another person who was very ill. As we exited the hospital and proceeded to where our car was parked, I felt the distinct impression to return and make inquiry concerning whether my friend Hyrum might still be a patient there. A check with the clerk at the desk confirmed that Hyrum was indeed a patient there after many weeks.

We proceeded to his room, knocked on the door, and opened it. We were not prepared for the sight that awaited us. Balloon bouquets were everywhere. Prominently displayed on the wall was a poster

with the words “Happy Birthday, Daddy” written on it. Hyrum was sitting up in his hospital bed, his family members by his side. When he saw us, he said, “Brother Monson, how in the world did you know that today is my birthday?” I smiled, but I left the question unanswered.

Those in the room who held the Melchizedek Priesthood surrounded this, their father and grandfather and my friend, and a priesthood blessing was given.

After tears were shed, smiles of gratitude exchanged, and tender hugs received and given, I leaned over to Hyrum and spoke softly to him: “Remember the words of the Lord, for they will sustain you. He promised you, ‘I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you’ (John 14:18).”

Time marches on. Duty keeps cadence with that march. Duty does not dim nor diminish. Catastrophic conflicts come and go, but the war waged for the souls of men continues without abatement. Like a clarion call comes the word of the Lord to you and to me, and to priesthood holders everywhere. I reiterate that word: “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the of-

fice in which he is appointed, in all diligence” (D&C 107:99).

Brethren, let us learn our duties. Let us ever be worthy to perform those duties and, in so doing, follow in the footsteps of the Master. When to Him came the call of duty, He answered, “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2). May we do likewise, I pray humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, amen.

Brethren, we remind you that the Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be from 9:30 to 10:00 a.m. tomorrow morning. The Sunday morning session will immediately follow.

We express appreciation to the Melchizedek Priesthood choir from Brigham City for the beautiful music they have provided this evening.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following President Hinckley’s remarks, the choir will sing “Lead, Kindly Light.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder W. Craig Zwick of the Seventy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Brethren, you look like a shirtsleeve priesthood. You look all dressed in white, ready to go to work. And the time has come to go to work.

What a remarkable sight this is. This great Conference Center is filled to capacity, and our words are flung across the world. This is probably the largest gathering of priesthood men that has ever occurred. I congratulate you on your presence tonight.

“Rise up, O men of God!”

I recently listened on television to a concert by the BYU Men’s Chorus. They

sang a stirring number entitled “Rise Up, O Men of God.” It was written in 1911 by William P. Merrill, and I discovered a version of it is found in our hymnbook, although I never remember singing it.

The words carry the spirit of the old English hymns written by Charles Wesley and others. The text reads:

Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things.
Give heart and soul and mind and
strength
To serve the King of Kings.
Rise up, O men of God,
In one united throng.

Bring in the day of brotherhood
And end the night of wrong.

Rise up, O men of God!
The church for you doth wait,
Her strength unequal to her task;
Rise up, and make her great!

Rise up, O men of God!
Tread where his feet have trod.
As brothers of the Son of Man,
Rise up, O men of God!
[*Hymns*, no. 324; third verse in *The Oxford American Hymnal*, ed. Carl F. Pfatteicher (1930), no. 256]

Living worthy of the priesthood

The scriptures are very plain in their application to each of us, my brethren. For instance, Nephi quotes from Isaiah, saying, “O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments—then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea” (1 Nephi 20:18; see also Isaiah 48:18).

The words of Lehi are a clarion call to all men and boys of the priesthood. Said he with great conviction: “Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust” (2 Nephi 1:23).

There is not a man or boy in this vast congregation tonight who cannot improve his life. And that needs to happen. After all, we hold the priesthood of God. If we are boys who have received the Aaronic Priesthood, we are entitled to the ministering of angels to guide and direct, to bless and protect us. What a remarkable and wonderful thing that is. If we have had conferred upon us the Melchizedek Priesthood, we have been given the keys of the kingdom that carry with them eternal powers. These were spoken of by the Lord when He laid His hands upon the heads of His disciples.

With this priesthood comes a great obligation to be worthy of it. We cannot

indulge in unclean thoughts. We must not partake of pornography. We must never be guilty of abuse of any kind. We must rise up above such things. “Rise up, O men of God!” and put these things behind you, and the Lord will be your guide and stay.

Said the prophet Isaiah, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

Concerns about dress and language

Some of you young men seem to delight in dressing in a slouchy manner. I know that it is a sensitive subject, but I believe it is unbecoming to young men who have been ordained to the holy priesthood of God. Our language at times matches our dress. We indulge in profanity, taking the name of the Lord in vain. God has spoken plainly against this.

I am confident you have heard this story of President Spencer W. Kimball, but I take the liberty of repeating it. He had undergone surgery in the hospital. A young male nurse had placed him on a gurney and was transporting him. When getting on the elevator, the nurse bumped the gurney and let out an oath using the name of the Lord.

President Kimball, only half-conscious, said, “Please! Please! That is my Lord whose name you revile.”

There was a deathly silence; then the young man whispered with a subdued voice, “I am sorry.” (See *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 198.)

Pursue educational opportunities

I call your attention to another matter that gives me great concern. In revelation the Lord has mandated that this people get all the education they can. He has

been very clear about this. But there is a troubling trend taking place. Elder Rolfe Kerr, Commissioner of Church Education, advises me that in the United States nearly 73 percent of young women graduate from high school, compared to 65 percent of young men. Young men are more likely to drop out of school than young women.

Approximately 61 percent of young men enroll in college immediately following high school, compared to 72 percent for young women.

In 1950, 70 percent of those enrolled in college were males, and 30 percent were females; by 2010, projections estimate 40 percent will be males, and 60 percent will be females.

Women have earned more bachelor's degrees than men every year since 1982 and more master's degrees since 1986.

It is plainly evident from these statistics that young women are exceeding young men in pursuing educational programs. And so I say to you young men, rise up and discipline yourself to take advantage of educational opportunities. Do you wish to marry a girl whose education has been far superior to your own? We speak of being "equally yoked." That applies, I think, to the matter of education.

In addition, your education will strengthen your service in the Church. A study was made some years ago that indicated the higher the education, the greater the faith and participation in religious activity.

Letter from a victim of pornography

I previously mentioned pornography. It easily becomes an addiction of the worst kind. Let me read to you from a letter I received from a victim:

"I would like to share something with you that I have not been able to share with anyone else. I am a 35-year-old male.

For most of my adult life I have been addicted to pornography. I am very ashamed to admit this, . . . but for the most part, my addiction is as real as that of an alcoholic or a drug addict. . . .

"The main reason for my writing is to tell you that the Church can't do enough to counsel the members to avoid pornography. I was first introduced to this material as a child. I was molested by an older male cousin, and pornography was used to attract my interest. I am convinced that this exposure at an early age to sex and pornography is at the root of my addiction today.

"I think it is ironic that those who support the business of pornography say that it is a matter of freedom of expression. I have no freedom. I have lost my free agency because I have been unable to overcome this. It is a trap for me, and I can't seem to get out of it. *Please, please, please* plead with the brethren of the Church not only to avoid but eliminate the sources of pornographic material in their lives. Besides the obvious things like books and magazines, they need to turn off cable movie channels in their homes. I know many who have these services and claim that they are able to screen the bad things out, but this is not true. . . .

"Pornography and perversion have become so commonplace in our lives that the sources of this material are everywhere. I have found pornographic magazines by the roadside and in dumps. We need to talk to our children and explain how evil these things are and encourage them to avoid looking at them when they come across them. . . .

"Finally, President Hinckley, please pray for me and others in the Church who may be like me to have the courage and strength to overcome this terrible affliction.

"I am unable to sign my name, and I hope that you will understand."

Avoiding what would harm us

The computer is a wonderful instrument when it is properly used. But when it is used to deal with pornography or so-called chat rooms or for any other purpose that leads to evil practices or evil thoughts, then there must be self-discipline enough to turn it off.

The Lord has declared, “Purge ye out the iniquity which is among you; sanctify yourselves before me” (D&C 43:11). No one can mistake the meaning of those words.

He says further, “The elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, man is the tabernacle of God, even temples; and whatsoever temple is defiled, God shall destroy that temple” (D&C 93:35). There is no equivocation there. The Lord has spoken plainly that we must take care of our mortal body and avoid that which would do it harm.

He has made to each of us a great promise. Said He, “Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers” (D&C 112:10).

And further: “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now” (D&C 121:26).

Study lives of Savior and Joseph Smith

All of us would do well to study the life of the Master and try to emulate His words and doings. We would likewise do well to study the life of the Prophet Joseph. From his example, each of us could learn much concerning our own behavior.

My brethren, I testify of the truth of these eternal qualities. I testify that if we will make an effort to improve our lives, the result will become evident. God bless you, each of you, my dear brethren. Of these things I testify, humbly and gratefully, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “Lead, Kindly Light.”
Elder W. Craig Zwick offered the benediction.

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth session of the 176th Semi-annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, October 1, 2006. President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and John Longhurst was the organist. The choir sang “How Firm a Foundation” to begin the session. President Hinckley then made the following remarks.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

We welcome you this morning to the fourth general session of the 176th Semi-annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, the Internet, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the facilities who are broadcasting this conference.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders who are here with us.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with John Longhurst at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing “How Firm a Foundation” and will now favor us with “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Carl B. Pratt of the Seventy. Following the invocation, the choir will sing “My Heavenly Father Loves Me.”

The choir sang “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire.”

Elder Carl B. Pratt offered the invocation.

The choir sang “My Heavenly Father Loves Me.”

President Hinckley

We will now be pleased to hear from President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, after which we shall hear from Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Bishop Richard C. Edgley of the Presiding Bishopric. Sister Margaret S. Lifferth, first counselor in the Primary general presidency, will then speak to us. Following her remarks, the choir and congregation will sing “Now Let Us Rejoice.”

We will then be pleased to hear from Elder Anthony D. Perkins of the Seventy, and he will be followed by Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The choir will then sing “How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place.”

President Thomas S. Monson

My dear brothers and sisters, both within my view and assembled throughout the world, I seek an interest in your faith and prayers as I respond to the assignment and privilege to address you.

The need for a deep foundation of faith

In 1959, not long after I began my service as president of the Canadian Mission, headquartered in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, I met N. Eldon Tanner, a prominent Canadian who just months later would be called as an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, then to the Quorum of the Twelve, and then as a counselor to four Presidents of the Church.

At the time I met him, President Tanner was president of the vast Trans-

Canada Pipelines, Ltd., and president of the Canada Calgary Stake. He was known as “Mr. Integrity” in Canada. During that first meeting, we discussed, among other subjects, the cold Canadian winters, where storms rage, temperatures can linger well below freezing for weeks at a time, and where icy winds lower those temperatures even further. I asked President Tanner why the roads and highways in western Canada basically remained intact during such winters, showing little or no signs of cracking or breaking, while the road surfaces in many areas where winters are less cold and less severe developed cracks and breaks and potholes.

Said he, “The answer is in the depth of the base of the paving materials. In order for them to remain strong and unbroken,

it is necessary to go very deep with the foundation layers. When the foundations are not deep enough, the surfaces cannot withstand the extremes of weather.”

Over the years I have thought often of this conversation and of President Tanner’s explanation, for I recognize in his words a profound application for our lives. Stated simply, if we do not have a deep foundation of faith and a solid testimony of truth, we may have difficulty withstanding the harsh storms and icy winds of adversity which inevitably come to each of us.

Withstanding the storms of life

Mortality is a period of testing, a time to prove ourselves worthy to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father. In order for us to be tested, we must face challenges and difficulties. These can break us, and the surface of our souls may crack and crumble—that is, if our foundations of faith, our testimonies of truth are not deeply embedded within us.

We can rely on the faith and testimony of others only so long. Eventually we must have our own strong and deeply placed foundation, or we will be unable to withstand the storms of life, which *will* come. Such storms come in a variety of forms. We may be faced with the sorrow and heartbreak of a wayward child who chooses to turn from the pathway leading to eternal truth and rather travel the slippery slopes of error and disillusionment. Sickness may strike us or a loved one, bringing suffering and sometimes death. Accidents may leave their cruel marks of remembrance or may snuff out life. Death comes to the aged as they walk on faltering feet. Its summons is heard by those who have scarcely reached midway in life’s journey, and often it hushes the laughter of little children.

At times there appears to be no light at the tunnel’s end, no dawn to break the night’s darkness. We feel surrounded by the pain of broken hearts, the disappointment of shattered dreams, and the despair of vanished hopes. We join in uttering the biblical plea, “Is there no balm in Gilead?” (Jeremiah 8:22). We are inclined to view our own personal misfortunes through the distorted prism of pessimism. We feel abandoned, heartbroken, alone.

Effort required for a strong foundation

How can we build a foundation strong enough to withstand such vicissitudes of life? How can we maintain the faith and testimony which will be required, that we might experience the joy promised to the faithful? Constant, steady effort is necessary. Most of us have experienced inspiration so strong that it brings tears to our eyes and a determination to ever remain faithful. I have heard the statement, “If I could just keep these feelings with me always, I would never have trouble doing what I should.” Such feelings, however, can be fleeting. The inspiration we feel during these conference sessions may diminish and fade as Monday comes and we face the routines of work, of school, of managing our homes and families. Such can easily take our minds from the holy to the mundane, from that which uplifts to that which, if we allow it, will chip away at our testimonies, our strong foundations.

Of course we do not live in a world where we experience nothing but the spiritual, but we can fortify our foundations of faith, our testimonies of truth, so that we will not falter, we will not fail. How, you may ask, can we most effectively gain and maintain the foundation needed to survive spiritually in the world in which we live?

May I offer three guidelines to help us in our quest.

Prayer

First, fortify your foundation through prayer. “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed” (“Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” *Hymns*, no. 145).

As we pray, let us really communicate with our Father in Heaven. It is easy to let our prayers become repetitious, expressing words with little or no thought behind them. When we remember that each of us is literally a spirit son or daughter of God, we will not find it difficult to approach Him in prayer. He knows us; He loves us; He wants what is best for us. Let us pray with sincerity and meaning, offering our thanks and asking for those things we feel we need. Let us listen for His answers, that we may recognize them when they come. As we do, we will be strengthened and blessed. We will come to know Him and His desires for our lives. By knowing Him, by trusting His will, our foundations of faith will be strengthened. If any one of us has been slow to hearken to the counsel to pray always, there is no finer hour to begin than now. William Cowper declared, “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees” (in William Neil, comp., *Concise Dictionary of Religious Quotations* [1974], 144).

Let us not neglect our family prayers. Such is an effective deterrent to sin, and thence a most beneficent provider of joy and happiness. That old saying is yet true: “The family that prays together stays together.” By providing an example of prayer to our children, we will also be helping them to begin their own deep foundations of faith and testimonies, which they will need throughout their lives.

Scripture study

My second guideline: Let us study the scriptures and “meditate therein day and night,” as counseled by the Lord in the book of Joshua (1:8).

In 2005, hundreds of thousands of Latter-day Saints accepted President Gordon B. Hinckley’s challenge to read the Book of Mormon by the end of the year. I do believe December of 2005 would set an all-time record for hours devoted to meeting the challenge on time. We were blessed when we completed the task; our testimonies were strengthened, our knowledge increased. I would encourage all of us to continue to read and study the scriptures, that we might understand them and apply in our lives the lessons we find there. I paraphrase the poet James Phinney Baxter:

Who learns and learns but never
knows
Is like the one who plows and plows
but never sows.
[“The Baxter Collection,” Baxter
Memorial Library, Gorham, Maine]

Spending time each day in scripture study will, without doubt, strengthen our foundations of faith and our testimonies of truth.

Recall with me the joy Alma experienced as he was journeying from the land of Gideon southward to the land of Manti and met the sons of Mosiah. Alma had not seen them for some time, and he was overjoyed to discover that they were “still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God” (see Alma 17:1–2).

May we also know the word of God and conduct our lives accordingly.

Service

My third guideline for building a strong foundation of faith and testimony involves service.

While driving to the office one morning, I passed a dry-cleaning establishment which had a sign in the window. It read,

“It’s the Service That Counts.” The sign’s message simply would not leave my mind. Suddenly I realized why. In actual fact it is the service that counts—the Lord’s service.

In the Book of Mormon we read of noble King Benjamin. In the true humility of an inspired leader, he recounted his desire to serve his people and lead them in paths of righteousness. He then declared to them:

“Because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

“And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:16–17).

This is the service that counts, the service to which all of us have been called: the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Along your pathway of life you will observe that you are not the only traveler. There are others who need your help. There are feet to steady, hands to grasp, minds to encourage, hearts to inspire, and souls to save.

Act of service by a Young Women class

Thirteen years ago it was my privilege to provide a blessing to a beautiful 12-year-old young lady, Jami Palmer. She had just been diagnosed with cancer and was frightened and bewildered. She subsequently underwent surgery and painful chemotherapy. Today she is cancer-free and is a bright, beautiful 26-year-old who has accomplished much in her life. Some time ago, I learned that in her darkest hour, when any future appeared somewhat grim, she learned that her leg where the cancer was situated would require multiple surgeries. A long-planned hike with her Young Women class up a rugged

trail to Timpanogos Cave—located in the Wasatch Mountains about 40 miles south of Salt Lake City, Utah—was out of the question, she thought. Jami told her friends they would have to undertake the hike without her. I’m confident there was a catch in her voice and disappointment in her heart. But then the other young women responded emphatically, “No, Jami, you are going with us!”

“But I can’t walk,” came the anguished reply.

“Then, Jami, we’ll carry you to the top!” And they did.

Today, the hike is a memory, but in reality it is much more. James Barrie, the Scottish poet, declared, “God gave us memories, that we might have June roses in the December of our lives” (paraphrasing James Barrie, in Laurence J. Peter, comp., *Peter’s Quotations: Ideas for Our Time* [1977], 335). None of those precious young women will ever forget that memorable day when a loving Heavenly Father looked down with a smile of approval and was well pleased.

As He enlists us to His cause, He invites us to draw close to Him, and we feel His Spirit in our lives.

As we establish a firm foundation for our lives, let us each one remember His precious promise:

Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not
dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give
thee aid.
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and
cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent
hand.
[“How Firm a Foundation,” *Hymns*,
no. 85]

May each of us qualify for this blessing, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.

Elder L. Tom Perry

Student shares gospel with truck driver

While attending a sacrament meeting during the summer months, I was fortunate to hear messages from three students who were home from school for the summer. One of the talks especially interested me.

She had been working during the summer recess in a restaurant frequented by truck drivers. One driver who had a regular run stopped at the restaurant on the same day each week to eat. The regularity of the stop created an opportunity for short visits. He asked the young lady where she lived. She reported that she was home for the summer to earn money to return to school in the fall. His next question was, “Where do you attend school?” Her answer with pride: “BYU–Idaho.” He wanted to know more about the school, which led to a gospel discussion. Her first approach was to teach him about the Word of Wisdom. She was successful. She convinced him to give up smoking.

Then her shift was changed, and she no longer had the opportunity to serve him, so she wrote him a note and enclosed a Church missionary tract about the plan of salvation. After several days she received a note from the driver. It simply stated, “You’ve created a monster.” Thanks to this young woman, he had found information which caused him to think about the changes he must make in his life. I do not know the full outcome of this little encounter between a waitress and a truck driver, but clearly his life was affected.

She then went on to explain how easy it is to let others know about the beauties of the gospel. Opportunities are there every day in our normal pursuits of life to open our mouths to let people know of the gospel truths that will bless them here and now and into the eternities to come.

God’s plan for us

Many people wonder, “Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?” Our Eternal Father did not send us to earth on an aimless, meaningless journey. He provided for us a plan to follow. He is the author of that plan. It is designed for man’s progress and ultimate salvation and exaltation. Quoting from the missionary guide *Preach My Gospel*:

“God is the Father of our spirits. We are literally His children, and He loves us. We lived as spirit children of our Father in Heaven before we were born on this earth. We were not, however, like our Heavenly Father, nor could we ever become like Him and enjoy all the blessings that He enjoys without the experience of living in mortality with a physical body.

“God’s whole purpose—His work and His glory—is to enable each of us to enjoy all His blessings. He has provided a perfect plan to accomplish His purpose. We understood and accepted this plan before we came to the earth” ([2004], 48).

Many in the world are confused

Yet many people in the world today continue to struggle to find answers to life’s most basic questions. The cries of “Lo, here” and “Lo, there” only grow louder and many, many times more confusing. Technology has multiplied the confusion by spreading these messages throughout the airwaves and across the massive amounts of cable lines that now cover the earth. There are so many avenues to broadcast more and more different messages, I guess it should not be surprising that people are confused. Centuries ago Paul predicted:

“The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

“And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

We need not be confused. The answers to the puzzling questions regarding the purpose of life have again been given to mankind for our guidance.

Our first estate

We first heard about the plan of salvation before we were born, in what the scriptures call our first estate (see Abraham 3:26). What occurred in this first estate is dimly understood, but we do know that we lived there as spirits, children of our Heavenly Father, and we made certain steps of advancement to prepare for the opportunity of housing our eternal spirits in earthly bodies. We also know that our Father held a great council to explain the purpose of earth life. We had the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the plan of salvation. It was not forced upon us. The essence of the plan was that man would have an opportunity of working out his own salvation on earth, with God’s help. A leader was selected to teach us how to follow the plan and to redeem us from sin and death. As the Lord explained to Moses, “Behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2).

Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, became the leader in advocating the plan designed by the Father, and we accepted the plan and its conditions. With that choice we earned the right to come to earth and enter our second estate.

Life in mortality

God created Adam and Eve in His own image, with bodies of flesh and bones, and placed them in the Garden of Eden. They were given the choice either to remain in the garden or to partake of

the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and have the opportunity of experiencing mortality. They accepted the challenge, partook of the fruit, and thus became mortal and subject to physical death. Because of their choice, they would experience all of the trials and difficulties of mortality.

There are two purposes for life in mortality. The first is that we might gain experiences that we could not obtain in any other way. The second is to obtain tabernacles of flesh and bones. Both of these purposes are vital to the existence of man. We are now being tried and tested to see if we will do all the things the Lord has commanded us to do. These commandments are the principles and ordinances of the gospel, and they constitute the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every principle and ordinance has a bearing upon the whole purpose of our testing, which is to prepare us to return to our Heavenly Father and become more like Him. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has said this about following the straight and narrow path:

“What I think all of us need to do is to determine where we stand in every field of mortal endeavor. Then, based on the general overall concepts that are clear and plain, we make a determination on how we will live in this field or in that field in order to pass the probationary estate in order to succeed in the test of mortality. If we make the right choices, we’ll go on to eternal reward, and if we do not, then we’ll get some lower and lesser place in the kingdoms that are prepared.

“... Everyone in the Church who is on the straight and narrow path, who is striving and struggling and desiring to do what is right, though [he] is far from perfect in this life; if he passes out of this life while he’s on the straight and narrow, he’s going to go on to eternal reward in his Father’s kingdom” (*The Probationary Test of Mortality*, devotional address, Salt Lake Institute of Religion, Jan. 10, 1982, 8–9).

Role of Jesus Christ

All of this is made possible by Jesus Christ. He is the centerpiece of the eternal plan of the Father, the Savior who was provided as a ransom for mankind. God sent His Beloved Son to overcome the Fall of Adam and Eve. He came to earth as our Savior and Redeemer. He overcame the obstacle of physical death for us by giving up His own life. When He died on the cross, His spirit became separated from His body. On the third day His spirit and His body were reunited eternally, never to be separated again.

Life on earth is of limited duration. There comes a time for all of us when the spirit and the body are separated in death. But because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will all be resurrected, regardless of whether we have accomplished good or evil in this life. Immortality is the gift to every mortal child of our Father in Heaven. Death must be viewed as a portal to a new and better life. Through the glorious resurrection, body and spirit will be reunited. We will have a perfect, immortal body of flesh and bones that will never be subjected to pain or death. But the glory we attain to in the next life will depend on our performance in this life. Only through the gift of the Atonement and our obedience to the gospel can we return and live with God once again.

Apostasy and restoration

After the Resurrection of the Savior, His Apostles went forth to preach this glorious message to the nations of the earth. They traveled extensively as they taught of the mission of our Savior. A great movement of Christianity started to spread throughout many lands. But the Church gradually drifted into a general apostasy in which the succession of the priesthood was broken. The authority to officiate in spiritual ordinances ceased to exist on earth.

Gradually, inspired men started to bring forth a reformation. President Gordon B. Hinckley has described it as the dawn of a brighter day. He said:

“Somehow, in that long season of darkness a candle was lighted. The age of Renaissance brought with it a flowering of learning, art, and science. There came a movement of bold and courageous men and women who looked heavenward in acknowledgment of God and His divine Son. We speak of it as the Reformation.

“And then, after many generations had walked the earth—so many of them in conflict, hatred, darkness, and evil—there arrived the great, new day of the Restoration. This glorious gospel was ushered in with the appearance of the Father and the Son to the boy Joseph. The dawn of the dispensation of the fulness of times rose upon the world. All of the good, the beautiful, the divine of all previous dispensations was restored in this most remarkable season” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 83–84; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 82–83).

Following the glorious event of the First Vision, the sacred record of the Book of Mormon was delivered to the Prophet Joseph Smith. This brought a new witness of our Lord and Savior and His mission to the peoples of the earth.

Thus we see in the eternal plan of our Father that His love has no bounds. Every one of His children is included. All men have the same origin and equal possibility to fulfill their eternal destiny.

The plan is known today

The Book of Mormon prophet Amulek, testifying that the words of Christ will bring us our salvation, said:

“And now, my brethren, I would that, after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, ye come forth and bring fruit unto repentance.

“Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.

“For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:30–32).

Let us be no more tossed to and fro by every worldly wind and doctrine of man (see Ephesians 4:14). We declare to the world that the heavens are open and the truth of God’s eternal plan has again been made known to mankind. We live in the

dispensation of the fulness of times. We live in a day when we have the witness through the scriptures of the great plan the Lord has given to His children from the beginning of time down to this present and last dispensation. The evidence is well documented; we are not left alone to wander through mortality without knowing of the master plan which the Lord has designed for His children. He has bound Himself by solemn covenant to give us the blessings of heaven according to our obedience to His law. Oh, remember, remember that these things are true, for the Lord God has revealed these eternal truths unto us. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Bishop Richard C. Edgley

Three towels: a lesson in honesty

In front of this vast worldwide audience and with some reservation, I make a personal confession. I do this as an introduction to a subject that has weighed heavily on my mind for some time. In 1955, after my freshman year of college, I spent the summer working at the newly opened Jackson Lake Lodge, located in Moran, Wyoming. My mode of transportation was a 14-year-old 1941 Hudson automobile that should have received its burial 10 years earlier. Among the car’s other identifying traits, the floorboards had rusted so badly that, if not for a piece of plywood, I could have literally dragged my feet on the highway. The positive is that unlike most 14-year-old cars in this time period, it used no oil—lots of water in the radiator, but no oil. I could never figure out where the water went and why the oil continually got thinner and thinner and clearer and clearer.

In preparation for the 185-mile drive home at the end of the summer, I took the car to the only mechanic in Moran. After

a quick analysis, the mechanic explained that the engine block was cracked and was leaking water into the oil. That explained the water and oil mystery. I wondered if I could get the water to leak into the gas tank; I would get better gasoline mileage.

Now the confession: after the miracle of arriving home, my father came out and happily greeted me. After a hug and a few pleasantries, he looked into the backseat of the car and saw three Jackson Lake Lodge towels—the kind you cannot buy. With a disappointed look, he merely said, “I expected more of you.” I hadn’t thought that what I had done was all that wrong. To me these towels were but a symbol of a full summer’s work at a luxury hotel, a rite of passage. Nevertheless, by taking them I felt I had lost the trust and confidence of my father, and I was devastated.

The following weekend I adjusted the plywood floorboard in my car, filled the radiator with water, and began the 370-mile round trip back to Jackson Lake Lodge to return three towels. My father never asked why I was returning to the lodge, and I never explained. It just didn’t

need to be said. This was an expensive and painful lesson on honesty that has stayed with me throughout my life.

Dishonesty in the world today

Sadly, some of the greatest missing values in today's world are honesty and integrity. In the past few years an increasing number of business leaders have been exposed for dishonesty and other forms of bad behavior. As a result, tens of thousands of loyal, long-term employees have lost their livelihoods and pensions. For some this has resulted in loss of homes, change of education and other life plans. We read and hear of widespread cheating in our schools, with more concern about receiving a grade or degree than learning and preparation. We hear of students who have cheated their way through medical school and are now performing complicated procedures on their patients. The elderly and others are victims of scam artists, often resulting in the loss of homes or life savings. Always this dishonesty and lack of integrity are based on greed, arrogance, and disrespect.

In Proverbs we read, "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight" (Proverbs 12:22).

Mormon, speaking of the converted Lamanites who were known as the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, wrote: "And they were among the people of Nephi, and also numbered among the people who were of the church of God. And they were also distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; *for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end*" (Alma 27:27; italics added).

Integrity and a 25-cent newspaper

Some 30 years ago, while working in the corporate world, some business associates and I were passing through O'Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois. One of these

men had just sold his company for tens of millions of dollars—in other words, he was not poor.

As we were passing a newspaper vending machine, this individual put a quarter in the machine, opened the door to the stack of papers inside the machine, and began dispensing unpaid-for newspapers to each of us. When he handed me a newspaper, I put a quarter in the machine and, trying not to offend but to make a point, jokingly said, "Jim, for 25 cents I can maintain my integrity. A dollar, questionable, but 25 cents—no, not for 25 cents." You see, I remembered well the experience of three towels and a broken-down 1941 Hudson. A few minutes later we passed the same newspaper vending machine. I noticed that Jim had broken away from our group and was stuffing quarters in the vending machine. I tell you this incident not to portray myself as an unusual example of honesty, but only to emphasize the lessons of three towels and a 25-cent newspaper.

There will never be honesty in the business world, in the schools, in the home, or anywhere else until there is honesty in the heart.

Important and lasting lessons are often taught through simple examples—perhaps as simple as three towels or a 25-cent newspaper. I wonder how the world would be if simple lessons of honesty were taught in the home at an early age, simple lessons such as "Love your neighbor as yourself" (see Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31) and "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" (see Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). I wonder where thousands of displaced employees would be today with their lost pensions if some businesspeople in high places had early experiences of three towels or a 25-cent newspaper.

Honesty a fundamental value

Honesty is the basis of a true Christian life. For Latter-day Saints, honesty is an

important requirement for entering the Lord's holy temple. Honesty is embedded in the covenants that we make in the temple. Each Sunday as we partake of the holy emblems of the Savior's flesh and blood, we again renew our basic and sacred covenants—which encompass honesty. As Latter-day Saints we have a sacred obligation to not only teach the principles of honesty but also to live them, perhaps with examples as simple as three towels or a 25-cent newspaper. Honesty should be among the most fundamental values that govern our everyday living.

When we are true to the sacred principles of honesty and integrity, we are true to our faith, and we are true to ourselves.

My prayer is that as Latter-day Saints we will be known as among the most honest people in the world. And it might be said of us, as it was of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi, that we are “perfectly honest and upright in all things; and . . . firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (Alma 27:27). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Margaret S. Lifferth

Children need the help of each of us

While I have been serving in this calling, I have made some new friends. Eliza can sing many Primary songs. Lucas is learning the Articles of Faith in Spanish. Caitlyn is shy but curious. I sat by Martha in Primary, and she wrapped her arm through mine. These children reflect the light of the gospel in their faces.

Who are the children in your home or in your neighborhood? Look at them. Think of them. The Savior teaches us that to enter the kingdom of God, we must become as a child, “submissive, meek, humble, patient, [and] full of love” (Mosiah 3:19).

But however full of faith children come to us, they face the challenges of a fallen world. What does it take to help these children keep the light of faith in their eyes? We know that nothing can replace a righteous family in the life of a child. But in today's world, children will need not only a devoted mother and father, but they will need each of us to protect, teach, and love them.

Protecting children

Brothers and sisters, protecting children means we provide an environment that invites the Spirit into their lives and validates it in their hearts. That automatically eliminates any form of indifference, neglect, abuse, violence, or exploitation.

And while conditions of depravity are more serious, we also protect children from other detrimental conditions, such as expectations that are too high or too low, overindulgence, overscheduling, and self-centeredness. Either extreme dulls a child's ability to identify, trust, and be guided by the Holy Ghost.

Teaching children

Children are open to gospel truths more than at any other time, and protected childhood is literally a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to teach and strengthen children to choose the right.

It's easy to know what to teach. The scriptures and our prophets are clear about what to teach our children. Nephi summarizes it in this verse, “And we talk

of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ . . . that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

Knowing that we teach of Christ and His gospel, how do we do it? Begin by following the counsel of our prophets and making time in our homes for family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening. Have we heard that counsel so often that it seems too simple? Or are we so busy that adding one more thing feels too complex? I testify that even when our family worship seems less than effective, obedience alone invites the blessings of the Lord.

In fact, personal obedience and example in every part of our lives are the ultimate gospel lessons for children. So study, learn, and apply the gospel. We cannot teach principles that we do not know and that we do not live. Who we are and what is in our heart are discerned by children more quickly than we think.

Loving children

So love the children. I remember feeling loved as a child, and because of that, it was easy for me to believe that the Savior loved me too. Children thrive in a home where parents understand their “sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

But all of us can help. Notice the children around you, and learn their names. And then invite, listen, affirm, guide, build, serve, and share testimony. Your love can help bring a child to the love of the Savior.

Vasily is a child who spends much of his time in the streets and is not supported by his parents in his search for truth. He found a small branch of the Church in his town, and he came to every event held at the church. He also brought his three

younger brothers to church, and other friends joined him in Primary. In fact, at one time, the largest Primary in that area was made up of these little boys who are not members of the Church. They were drawn to the truth, and the light of the gospel began to be reflected in their faces. They were welcomed, protected, taught, and loved by all the members of that little branch, including youth, young adults, missionaries, teachers, and priesthood leaders. Think of the children in your neighborhood or Primary class. Who are the children in your branch or ward? Is there one, like Vasily, who needs you?

Bringing children to the Savior

When I think of these little boys and children like them, I take great hope from the account of the Savior’s visit to the American continent. Remember that before the Savior’s appearance, there were tempests, earthquakes, fires, and three days of profound darkness (see 3 Nephi 8). I have often thought about the children who experienced these events. And I can only imagine the fear and concern in the hearts of the parents.

And then the Savior appeared and commanded the multitude “that their little children should be brought” to Him (3 Nephi 17:11). How eager those parents must have been to bring their children to the Savior. And then they watched as the Savior wept over their children, blessed them one by one, prayed unto the Father for them, and called down angels to minister unto them (see 3 Nephi 17:21, 24). This account reminds us that it is the Savior who is the great protector, the ultimate teacher, and the eternal source of love and healing.

As the darkness of this day surrounds us, we are also commanded to bring our children to the Savior, and as Elder Ballard has reminded us, “we are the ones God has appointed to encircle today’s children with love and the fire of faith and an

understanding of who they are” (“Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1994, 60).

Brothers and sisters, as a mother and a Primary leader, I know this work with children is not easy. Protecting, teaching, and loving children can be demanding, often discouraging, sometimes exhausting, and occasionally the fruits of our efforts are long delayed. But it is precisely because it is not easy to bring children to the Savior that we must come to Him ourselves.

As we seek Him and His Spirit to help us, we will see a miracle. We will recognize that our own hearts are changing and

we too are becoming “submissive, meek, humble, patient, [and] full of love” (Mosiah 3:19). We too will reflect the light of the gospel in our own countenance. We will come to understand these words of the Savior: “And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me” (Matthew 18:5).

I love the Savior and testify of His redeeming power for me and you and for our children, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir and congregation sang
“Now Let Us Rejoice.”

Elder Anthony D. Perkins

Snares of Satan

Children in pure faith proclaim, “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.”¹ But sometimes youth and adults do not feel the power of this simple declaration.

Satan is the “enemy to all righteousness”;² thus he plants doubts about the nature of the Godhead and our relationship with Them. Jesus Christ prophesied that in the last days even the very elect would be deceived.³ Consider three examples of how Lucifer is “laying traps and snares to catch the holy ones of God.”⁴

The snare of false inadequacy. A faithful young person feels unable to meet the expectations of others. At home and school, she is rarely praised and often criticized. The popular media tells her she is not beautiful enough or smart enough. Every day this righteous sister questions whether she is an individual worthy of Heavenly Father’s love, the Savior’s atoning sacrifice, or the Spirit’s constant guidance.

The snare of exaggerated imperfection. An outstanding missionary feels incapable

of meeting the expectations of God. In his mind, this worthy elder imagines a stern Heavenly Father bound to irrevocable justice, a Savior capable of cleansing others’ transgressions but not this elder’s own, and a Holy Ghost unwilling to accompany an imperfect person.

The snare of needless guilt. A middle-aged woman is a devoted mother, a loving friend, a faithful Church servant, and a frequent temple patron. But in her heart, this sister cannot forgive herself of sins committed years ago that she has repented of and fully resolved with priesthood leaders. She doubts that her life will ever be acceptable to the Lord and has lost hope of eternal life in Heavenly Father’s presence.

Feeling God’s love

If you have any thoughts and feelings similar to these good Saints, I invite you to become as a little child and feel again “the great and wonderful love made manifest by the Father and the Son in the coming of the Redeemer into the world.”⁵ Childlike faith in the perfect love of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ will “divide

asunder”⁶ Satan’s snares of inadequacy, imperfection, and guilt.

Proverbs teaches, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”⁷ May I suggest—in addition to consistent prayers, scripture study, and Church and temple attendance—five changes to your thoughts and heart to more fully feel the tender love of God.

See yourself as a child of God

First, see yourself as a precious child of a loving Father in Heaven. Our children with confidence sing, “I am a child of God, and he has sent me here.”⁸ Little children feel and know what perhaps you have forgotten. You are the beloved son or daughter of Heavenly Father, created “in his own image,”⁹ and of immense value—so much so that Jesus Christ gave His life for you.

God the Father is merciful and has infinite love for you despite your faults. Only the voice of Satan will cause you to feel of no value. In contrast, the Holy Ghost will cause you to feel “godly sorrow”¹⁰ unto repentance in a manner that fills you with hope of positive change.

When you feel worthless, “remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God.”¹¹ Refrain from repeatedly thinking or saying negative words about yourself—there is a clear difference between humility and humiliation. Identify and use your unique talents rather than dwelling on your weaknesses.

Place burdens on the Savior

Second, place your burdens on Jesus Christ. When you feel overwhelmed by expectations and challenges, do not fight the battle alone. Follow the example of small children, and drop to your knees in prayer.

Jesus Christ has commanded us, “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.”¹² Doubt, fear, and worry indicate we have taken all of life’s burdens and anxieties on ourselves. When plagued

by thoughts that you are inadequate, confidently say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”¹³ Then as you “cheerfully do all things that lie in [your] power,”¹⁴ you can rest assured that the Lord will do the remainder and things will work out all right.

The Savior promised, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”¹⁵ As you “cast [your] burden upon the Lord,”¹⁶ you will feel the peace of the Spirit.¹⁷

Forgive yourself

Third, forgive yourself of sins and imperfections. Heavenly Father is not expecting you to become completely perfect in this life. He knew His children would make mistakes as they learned from experience in mortality. But “God so loved the world”¹⁸ that His plan of happiness provided a merciful Savior.

Jesus said, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”¹⁹ Start with yourself, and forgive others as well. If God will not remember our repented-of sins,²⁰ then why should we? Avoid wasting time and energy reliving the past.

To forgive yourself and others, you must trust the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The prophet Zenock prayed, “Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.”²¹ Our Father in Heaven is saddened when we limit the power of His Son’s atoning sacrifice. As you exercise faith in Jesus Christ, you can have your guilt “swept away.”²² If guilt remains after sincere repentance, believe your priesthood leaders when they declare you to be worthy.²³

Have hope

Fourth, sustain hope of eternal life. If you imagine that your prior sins, character flaws, and poor decisions prevent you

from receiving all of God's blessings, consider the experience of Alma the Elder. Referring to his younger years as an immoral priest for the wicked King Noah, Alma admitted, "I myself was caught in a snare, and did many things which were abominable in the sight of the Lord, which caused me sore repentance."²⁴ Yet Alma's repentance was so complete and Christ's Atonement so infinite that Alma became a prophet and was promised eternal life.²⁵ As you do your best to be obedient and repentant, you too can receive a place in the celestial kingdom through the Atonement and grace of Jesus Christ.²⁶

Find joy

Fifth, find joy each day. One source of joy is service, for when you are busy helping others, you will have less capacity to agonize over your own shortcomings. The Savior wisely taught, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it."²⁷

You will experience greater joy in life as you eradicate adult-onset pessimism and substitute childlike optimism. Optimism is a virtue that allows us to see God's loving hand in the details of our life. A favorite hymn counsels, "Count your many blessings; see what God hath done."²⁸

I testify of Heavenly Father, who in great and wonderful love reaches out to each of His children. I bear witness of Jesus Christ, who is "mighty to save"²⁹ us from our inadequacies, imperfections, and sins. I bear testimony of the Holy Ghost, who will accompany the imperfect yet penitent soul. To you faithful and worthy Saints who struggle with latter-day snares of the devil,³⁰ "may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son."³¹ In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Articles of Faith 1:1.
2. Alma 34:23; see also Acts 13:10; Mosiah 4:14; Moroni 9:6.
3. See Matthew 24:24; see also Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22, 37.
4. Alma 10:17.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 138:3.
6. Helaman 3:29.
7. Proverbs 23:7.
8. "I Am a Child of God," *Hymns*, no. 301.
9. Genesis 1:27; see also Alma 22:12; Ether 3:15–16; Doctrine and Covenants 20:17–18; Moses 6:8–10; Abraham 4:26–27.
10. 2 Corinthians 7:10.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 18:10.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36; see also Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 10:31; Luke 8:50; Doctrine and Covenants 50:41; 122:9.
13. Philippians 4:13; see also 2 Corinthians 12:7–10; Hebrews 11:33–34; 1 Nephi 7:12; 17:3; Jacob 4:7; Alma 26:12; Ether 12:27.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 123:17.
15. Matthew 11:28.
16. Psalm 55:22.
17. See Galatians 5:22; see also Doctrine and Covenants 19:23.
18. John 3:16.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:42; see also Psalm 25:7; Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17; Alma 36:19.
21. Alma 33:16.
22. See Enos 1:3–8; see also Alma 24:10; 36:16–19.
23. See Marvin J. Ashton, "On Being Worthy," *Ensign*, May 1989, 20–22.
24. Mosiah 23:9.
25. See Mosiah 26:20.
26. See Titus 3:7; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Nephi 2:6–8; 10:24–25; 25:23; Enos 1:27; Moroni 7:41; Doctrine and Covenants 138:14.
27. Mark 8:35; see also Alma 36:24–25.
28. "Count Your Blessings," *Hymns*, no. 241.
29. 2 Nephi 31:19; see also Isaiah 63:1; Alma 7:14; 34:18; Doctrine and Covenants 133:47.
30. See 2 Timothy 2:26.
31. Alma 33:23.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

My beloved brothers and sisters, thank you for your faith, your devotion, and your love. We share an enormous responsibility to be who the Lord wants us to be and to do what He wants us to do. We are part of a great movement—the gathering of scattered Israel. I speak of this doctrine today because of its unique importance in God’s eternal plan.

Abrahamic covenant

Anciently, the Lord blessed Father Abraham with a promise to make his posterity a chosen people.¹ References to this covenant occur throughout the scriptures. Included were promises that the Son of God would come through Abraham’s lineage, that certain lands would be inherited, that nations and kindreds of the earth would be blessed through his seed, and more.² While some aspects of that covenant have already been fulfilled, the Book of Mormon teaches that this Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled only in these latter days!³ It also emphasizes that we are among the covenant people of the Lord.⁴ Ours is the privilege to participate personally in the fulfillment of these promises. What an exciting time to live!

Israel became scattered

As descendants of Abraham, the tribes of ancient Israel had access to priesthood authority and blessings of the gospel, but eventually the people rebelled. They killed the prophets and were punished by the Lord. Ten tribes were carried captive into Assyria. From there they became lost to the records of mankind. (Obviously, the ten tribes are not lost to the Lord.) Two remaining tribes continued a short time and then, because of their rebellion, were taken captive into Babylon.⁵ When they returned, they were favored of the Lord, but again they honored Him

not. They rejected and vilified Him. A loving but grieving Father vowed, “I will scatter you among the heathen,”⁶ and that He did—into all nations.

Israel to be gathered

God’s promise for the gathering of scattered Israel was equally emphatic.⁷ Isaiah, for example, foresaw that in the latter days the Lord would send “swift messengers” to these people who were so “scattered and peeled.”⁸

This promise of the gathering, woven all through the fabric of the scriptures, will be fulfilled just as surely as were the prophecies of the scattering of Israel.⁹

The Church of Jesus Christ in the meridian of time and the Apostasy

Prior to His Crucifixion, the Lord Jesus Christ had established His Church. It included apostles, prophets, sevens, teachers, and so forth.¹⁰ And the Master sent His disciples into the world to preach His gospel.¹¹

After a time the Church as established by the Lord fell into spiritual decay. His teachings were altered; His ordinances were changed. The Great Apostasy came as had been foretold by Paul, who knew that the Lord would not come again “except there come a falling away first.”¹²

This Great Apostasy followed the pattern that had ended each previous dispensation. The very first was in the time of Adam. Then came dispensations of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others. Each prophet had a divine commission to teach of the divinity and the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ. In each age these teachings were meant to help the people. But their disobedience resulted in apostasy. Thus, all previous dispensations were limited in time and location. They were limited in time be-

cause each ended in apostasy. They were limited in location to a relatively small segment of planet earth.

The restoration of all things

Thus a complete restoration was required. God the Father and Jesus Christ called upon the Prophet Joseph Smith to be the prophet of this dispensation. All divine powers of previous dispensations were to be restored through him.¹³ This dispensation of the fulness of times would not be limited in time or in location. It would not end in apostasy, and it would fill the world.¹⁴

The gathering of Israel—an integral part of the restoration of all things

As prophesied by Peter and Paul, *all* things were to be restored in this dispensation. Therefore, there must come, as part of that restoration, the long-awaited gathering of scattered Israel.¹⁵ It is a necessary prelude to the Second Coming of the Lord.¹⁶

This doctrine of the gathering is one of the important teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Lord has declared, “I give unto you a sign . . . that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion.”¹⁷ The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is a sign to the entire world that the Lord has commenced to gather Israel and fulfill covenants He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁸ We not only teach this doctrine, but we participate in it. We do so as we help to gather the elect of the Lord on both sides of the veil.

The Book of Mormon is central to this work. It declares the doctrine of the gathering.¹⁹ It causes people to learn about Jesus Christ, to believe His gospel, and to join His Church. In fact, if there were no Book of Mormon, the promised gathering of Israel would not occur.²⁰

To us the honored name of *Abraham* is important. It is mentioned in more verses of scriptures of the Restoration than in all verses of the Bible.²¹ Abraham is linked to all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.²² The Lord reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant in our day through the Prophet Joseph Smith.²³ In the temple we receive our ultimate blessings, as the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.²⁴

The dispensation of the fulness of times

This dispensation of the fulness of times was foreseen by God as the time to gather, both in heaven and on earth. Peter knew that after a period of apostasy, a restoration would come. He, who had been with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, declared:

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; . . .

“Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”²⁵

In modern times the Apostles Peter, James, and John were sent by the Lord with “the keys of [His] kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times,” in which He would “gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.”²⁶

In the year 1830 the Prophet Joseph Smith learned of a heavenly messenger named Elias, who possessed keys to bring to pass “the restoration of all things.”²⁷

Six years later the Kirtland Temple was dedicated. After the Lord accepted that holy house, heavenly messengers came with priesthood keys. Moses appeared²⁸ “and committed . . . the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north.

“After this, Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed.”²⁹

Then Elijah the prophet came and proclaimed, “Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse.”³⁰

These events occurred on April 3, 1836,³¹ and thus fulfilled Malachi’s prophecy.³² Sacred keys of this dispensation were restored.³³

Gathering of souls on the other side of the veil

Mercifully, the invitation to “come unto Christ”³⁴ can also be extended to those who died without a knowledge of the gospel.³⁵ Part of their preparation requires earthly efforts of others. We gather pedigree charts, create family group sheets, and do temple work vicariously to gather individuals unto the Lord and into their families.³⁶

To participate in the gathering: a commitment by covenant

Here on earth, missionary work is crucial to the gathering of Israel. The gospel was to be taken first to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”³⁷ Consequently, servants of the Lord have gone forth proclaiming the Restoration. In many nations our missionaries have searched for those of scattered Israel; they have hunted for them “out of the holes of the rocks”; and they have fished for them as in ancient days.³⁸

The choice to come unto Christ is not a matter of physical location; it is a matter of individual commitment. People can be “brought to the knowledge of the Lord”³⁹

without leaving their homelands. True, in the early days of the Church, conversion often meant emigration as well. But now the gathering takes place in each nation. The Lord has decreed the establishment of Zion⁴⁰ in each realm where He has given His Saints their birth and nationality. Scripture foretells that the people “shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise.”⁴¹ “Every nation is the gathering place for its own people.”⁴² The place of gathering for Brazilian Saints is in Brazil; the place of gathering for Nigerian Saints is in Nigeria; the place of gathering for Korean Saints is in Korea; and so forth. Zion is “the pure in heart.”⁴³ Zion is wherever righteous Saints are. Publications, communications, and congregations are now such that nearly all members have access to the doctrines, keys, ordinances, and blessings of the gospel, regardless of their location.

Spiritual security will always depend upon *how* one lives, not *where* one lives. Saints in every land have equal claim upon the blessings of the Lord.

This work of Almighty God is true. He lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church, restored to accomplish its divine destiny, including the promised gathering of Israel. President Gordon B. Hinckley is God’s prophet today. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Genesis 12:1–2; Doctrine and Covenants 132:29–32; Abraham 2:6–11.
2. See Genesis 26:1–4, 24, 28; 35:9–13; 48:3–4; John 8:33, 39; Acts 3:25; 1 Nephi 17:40; 2 Nephi 29:14; Jacob 5; Ether 13:7–8; Doctrine and Covenants 52:2.
3. See, for example, 1 Nephi 15:12–18.
4. See 1 Nephi 14:14; 15:14; 2 Nephi 30:2; Mosiah 24:13; 3 Nephi 29:3; Mormon 8:15; Doctrine and Covenants 133:26–34.
5. The tribe of Levi provided priests among the people and was not to be numbered as a tribe or to receive tribal inheritance. Two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and

- Ephraim, were given land inheritances. They were numbered among the tribes, in the stead of their father, Joseph. The number of twelve tribes was thus maintained.
6. Leviticus 26:33; see also Jeremiah 9:16.
 7. See Genesis 22:16–18; 3 Nephi 20–22; Abraham 2:10–11.
 8. Isaiah 18:2, 7.
 9. See Leviticus 26:44; Deuteronomy 4:27–31; 28; 29; 30:2–5; Nehemiah 1:9; Isaiah 11:11–12; Jeremiah 31:7–8, 10–12; Ezekiel 37:21–22; Amos 9:14–15; Matthew 24:31; Jacob 6:2; see also Russell M. Nelson, “The Exodus Repeated,” *Ensign*, July 1999, 6–13.
 10. See Luke 10:1, 17; Ephesians 4:11; Articles of Faith 1:6.
 11. See Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15.
 12. 2 Thessalonians 2:3. “Falling away” is translated from the Greek *apostasia*, meaning “apostasy.”
 13. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:18; 132:45.
 14. See Isaiah 27:6.
 15. See 1 Nephi 15:18; see also Book of Mormon title page, paragraph 2.
 16. See Doctrine and Covenants 133:17.
 17. 3 Nephi 21:1.
 18. See Genesis 12:2–3; 26:3–4; 35:11–12; and chapter headings for 3 Nephi 21; 29.
 19. Doctrines relating to the scattering and gathering of the house of Israel are among the earliest lessons taught in the Book of Mormon: “After the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; . . . the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:14).
 20. See Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (1985), 554.
 21. Abraham is mentioned in 506 verses of scripture: 216 are in the Bible; 290 are in the scriptures of the Restoration.
 22. The covenant may also be received by adoption (see Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; Galatians 3:26–29; 4:5–7; Abraham 2:9–10).
 23. See Doctrine and Covenants 124:58; 132:31–32.
 24. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–40; 132:19; Abraham 2:11.
 25. Acts 3:19, 21.
 26. Doctrine and Covenants 27:13. Paul also prophesied of our day “that in the dispensation of the fulness of times [the Lord] might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (Ephesians 1:10).
 27. Doctrine and Covenants 27:6.
 28. It is appropriate that Moses, who first led God’s children to the land of their inheritance, would be the one to commit the keys of the gathering of Israel to the restored Church. Moses had come to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration and there had bestowed upon them the same priesthood keys in their day. At the conference of the Church in April 1840, the Prophet Joseph Smith appointed Orson Hyde to go to Jerusalem and there dedicate the land for the return of the Jews and scattered Israel (see 2 Nephi 9:2; 10:7–9; 25:16–17, 20; 3 Nephi 21:22–28; D&C 29:7–8). On Sunday, October 24, 1841, Elder Hyde knelt on the Mount of Olives and dedicated that land for the gathering of the Jews and of Israel to their ancient inheritance.
 29. Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–12.
 30. Doctrine and Covenants 110:14–15.
 31. Significant is the fact that Moses, Elias, and Elijah came on Easter Sunday, at the beginning of Passover.
 32. See Malachi 4:5–6.
 33. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:16.
 34. Jacob 1:7; Omni 1:26; Moroni 10:30, 32; Doctrine and Covenants 20:59.
 35. See Doctrine and Covenants 137:6–8.
 36. See 1 Corinthians 15:29; 1 Peter 4:6.
 37. Matthew 10:6; 15:24.
 38. See Jeremiah 16:16.
 39. 3 Nephi 20:13.
 40. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:6; 11:6; 12:6; 14:6.
 41. 2 Nephi 9:2.

42. Bruce R. McConkie, in Conference Report, Mexico City Mexico Area Conference 1972, 45.
 43. Doctrine and Covenants 97:21.

The choir sang “How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place.”

President Hinckley

We are grateful to the choir for their beautiful music. Following my remarks, they will sing “Come, Ye Thankful People,” and the benediction will then be offered by Elder W. Douglas Shumway of the Seventy. We shall meet again at 2:00.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

President Hinckley’s health

My brothers and sisters, let me first deal with a personal matter.

The President of the Church belongs to the entire Church. His life is not his own. His mission is to serve.

Now, as all of you know, I am somewhat old in years. I had my 96th birthday last June. I have learned from many sources that there is considerable speculation concerning my health. I wish to put the record straight. If I last a few months longer, I will have served to an older age than any previous President. I do not say this to be boastful but rather grateful. Last January I underwent major surgery. It was a miserable experience, particularly for one who had never previously been a patient in a hospital. Following this was the question as to whether I should undergo further treatment. I chose to do so. My doctors have called the results miraculous. I know that the favorable results come from your many prayers in my behalf. I am deeply grateful to you.

The Lord has permitted me to live; I do not know for how long. But whatever the time, I shall continue to give my best to the task at hand. It is not an easy thing to preside over this large, complex Church. Nothing escapes the attention of the First Presidency. No major decision, no expenditure of funds is made without their approval. The responsibility and stress are great.

But we shall carry on as long as the Lord wishes. As I said last April, we are in His hands. I feel well; my health is reasonably good. But when it is time for a successor, the transition will be smooth and according to the will of Him whose Church this is. And so, we go forward in faith—and faith is the theme I wish to discuss this morning.

Moving forward with faith

From the beginning this Church has moved forward with faith. Faith was the strength of the Prophet Joseph.

I am grateful for the faith that took him into the grove to pray. I am grateful for his faith to translate and publish the Book of Mormon. I am grateful that he went to the Lord in prayer that was answered with the bestowal of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. I am grateful that in faith he organized the Church and set it on its course. I thank him for the gift of his life as a testimony to the truth of this work.

Faith was also the moving power behind Brigham Young. I often reflect on the tremendous faith he exercised in bringing a very large number of people to settle this Salt Lake Valley. He knew very little of the area. He had never seen it, except in vision. I suppose he had studied what meager information there was, but he knew almost nothing of the soil or the water or the climate. And yet when he

looked upon it, he said without hesitation, “This is the right place, drive on” (in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 3:224).

And so it has been with each of the Presidents of the Church. In the face of terrible opposition, they have moved forward with faith. Whether it was crickets destroying their crops. Whether it was drought or late frost. Whether it was persecution by the federal government. Or, more recently, whether it was an urgent need to extend humanitarian aid to victims of the tsunami, or earthquakes, or floods in divers places, it has all been the same. Welfare shelves have been emptied. Cash by the millions has been dispatched to those in need, regardless of Church membership—all in faith.

Suffering and faith of pioneers of 1856

This is an important anniversary year in the history of the Church, as all of you know. It is the 150th anniversary of the coming of the Willie and Martin handcart companies and the Hunt and Hodgett wagon companies which accompanied them.

Much has been written concerning this, and I need not go into detail. All of you are familiar with the story. Suffice it to say that those who set out on the long journey from the British Isles to the valley of the Great Salt Lake began their travel in faith. They had little or no knowledge of what they were getting into. But they moved forward. They began their journey with great expectation. That expectation gradually failed them as they moved west. As they commenced the tedious journey following the Platte River and then up the valley of the Sweetwater, the cold hand of death took its fearsome toll. Their food was rationed; their oxen died; their carts broke down; they had inadequate bedding and clothing. Storms raged. They sought shelter, but they found none. The storms

beat about them. They literally starved to death. Scores died and were buried in the frozen ground.

“Go and bring in those people”

Fortunately, they were passed by Franklin D. Richards on his way from England. He had a lightweight conveyance with horses and was able to travel much faster. He came on to this valley. It was this very season of the year. The general conference was in session. When Brigham Young received the news, he immediately stood before the congregation and said:

“I will now give this people the subject and the text for the Elders who may speak to-day and during the conference, it is this, on the 5th day of October, 1856, many of our brethren and sisters are on the plains with hand-carts, and probably many are now 700 miles from this place, and they must be brought here, we must send assistance to them. The text will be, ‘to get them here.’ I want the brethren who may speak to understand that their text is the people on the plains, and the subject matter for this community is to send for them and bring them in before the winter sets in. . . .

“I shall call upon the Bishops this day, I shall not wait until to-morrow, nor until [the] next day, for 60 good mule teams and 12 or 15 wagons. I do not want to send oxen, I want good horses and mules. They are in this Territory, and we must have them; also 12 tons of flour and 40 good teamsters, . . . 60 or 65 good spans of mules, or horses, with harness. . . .

“I will tell you all,” said he, “that your faith, religion, and profession of religion, will never save one soul of you in the celestial kingdom of our God, unless you carry out just such principles as I am now teaching you. Go and bring in those people now on the plains, and attend strictly to those things which we call temporal, or

temporal duties, otherwise your faith will be in vain; the preaching you have heard will be in vain to you, and you will sink to hell, unless you attend to the things we tell you" (*Deseret News*, Oct. 15, 1856, 252).

Immediately horses and mules and strong wagons were offered. Flour in abundance was forthcoming. Warm clothing and bedding were quickly assembled. Within a day or two the loaded wagons were moving eastward through the snow.

When the rescuers reached the beleaguered Saints, they were like angels from heaven. People wept tears of gratitude. The handcart people were transferred into wagons so they could travel more quickly to the Salt Lake community.

Some two hundred died, but a thousand were saved.

Mary Penfold Goble among the victims

Among those who were in dire circumstances on the plains was my wife's great-grandmother. She was part of the Hunt wagon company.

Today, my wife's gravesite in the Salt Lake City Cemetery looks down at the gravesite of her great-grandmother, Mary Penfold Goble, who died in the arms of her daughter as she was entering this valley on December 11, 1856. She was buried the next day. She had lost three of her children on that long journey. The feet of a surviving daughter were terribly frozen.

What a story it is. It is filled with suffering and hunger and cold and death. It is replete with accounts of freezing rivers that had to be waded through; of howling blizzards; of the long, slow climb up Rocky Ridge. With the passing of this anniversary year, it may become largely forgotten. But hopefully it will be told again and again to remind future generations of the suffering and the faith of those who came before. Their faith is our inheritance. Their faith is a reminder to us of the price they paid for the comforts we enjoy.

The faith of a widow

But faith is not demonstrated only in big heroic events, such as the coming of the handcart pioneers. It is also demonstrated in small but significant events. Let me tell you of one such event.

When the Manti Utah Temple was under construction some 120 years ago, George Paxman worked as a finish carpenter. He and his young wife, Martha, had one child and were expecting another.

While hanging one of the heavy east doors of the temple, George suffered a strangulated hernia. He was in terrible pain. Martha laid him in a wagon and took him to the town of Nephi, where she put him on the train and took him to Provo. There he died. Spurning marriage, she remained a widow for 62 years, supporting herself with needlework.

Now permit me to diverge from this narrative to say that when I was engaged to marry my wife, I gave her a ring. When we were married, I gave her a wedding band. She wore them for years. Then one day I noticed that she had taken them off and was wearing this little gold wedding band. It had belonged to her grandmother. The ring had been given her by her husband, George. The ring was the only thing he left in this life. One day in the spring, Martha was housecleaning. She brought all of the furnishings out to give the house a thorough cleaning. Upon shaking the straw from the mattress, she looked down, and the ring was gone. She looked everywhere most carefully. It was the only physical remembrance of her beloved husband. She raked through the straw with her fingers but could not find the ring. Tears fell from her eyes. She went to her knees and prayed that the Lord would help her to find the ring. When she opened her eyes, she looked down and there it was.

Now I hold it in my hand. It is too small for all of you to see. It is 18-karat gold, old and scarred and bent. But it represents faith, the faith of a widow who

pleaded with the Lord in her extremity. Such faith is the wellspring of activity. It is the root of hope and trust. It is this simple faith that all of us so much need.

The need for increased faith

In the on-working of this great cause, increased faith is what we most need. Without it, the work would stagnate. With it, no one can stop its progress.

Said the Savior, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matthew 17:20).

To his son Helaman, Alma declared, “Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to

humble themselves and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Alma 37:33).

May the Lord bless us with faith in the great cause of which we are a part. May faith be as a candle to guide us in the night by its light. May it go before us as a cloud in the day.

For this I humbly pray, in the sacred and holy name of Him who is the strength of our faith, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “Come, Ye Thankful People.”

Elder W. Douglas Shumway offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 176th Semiannual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 1, 2006. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Bonnie Goodliffe and Linda Margetts were the organists.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 176th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, the Internet, or satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Bonnie Goodliffe and Linda Margetts at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing “I Saw a Mighty Angel Fly.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Jay E. Jensen of the Seventy.

Following the invocation, the choir will sing “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee.” Then President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, will address us, after which we shall hear from Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and he will be followed by A. Roger Merrill, general president of the

Sunday School, and Elder Craig A. Cardon of the Seventy.

The choir sang “I Saw a Mighty Angel Fly.”

Elder Jay E. Jensen offered the invocation.

The choir sang “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee.”

President Boyd K. Packer

An ensign to the nations

On July 26, 1847, their third day in the valley (the second having been the Sabbath), Brigham Young, with members of the Twelve and some others, climbed a peak about one and a half miles from where I now stand. They thought it a good place to raise an ensign to the nations. Heber C. Kimball wore a yellow bandana. They tied it to Willard Richards’s walking stick and waved it aloft, an ensign to the nations. Brigham Young named it Ensign Peak.¹

Then they descended to their worn-out wagons, to the few things they had carried 2,000 miles, and to their travel-weary followers. It was not what they possessed that gave them strength but what they knew.

They knew they were Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. They knew that the priesthood had been delivered to them by angelic messengers. They knew they had the commandments and the covenants to offer opportunity for the eternal salvation and exaltation for all mankind. They were sure that the inspiration of the Holy Ghost attended them.

They busied themselves plowing up gardens, putting up shelters against the winter soon to come. They prepared for others already on the prairie following them to this new gathering place.

A revelation, written nine years earlier, directed them to “arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations;

“And that the gathering together upon the land of Zion, and upon her stakes, may

be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth” (D&C 115:5–6).

They were to be the “light,” the “standard.”

Living by the standards

The standard, established by revelation, is contained in the scriptures through the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The principles of the gospel life we follow are based on doctrine, and the standards accord with the principles. We are bound to the standards by covenant, as administered through the ordinances of the gospel by those who have received priesthood and the keys of authority.

Those faithful Brethren were not free, and we are not free, to alter the standards or to ignore them. We must live by them.

It is not a cure or a comfort to simply say they do not matter. We all know they do matter, for all mankind is “instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil” (2 Nephi 2:5).

If we are doing the best we can, we should not become discouraged. When we fall short, as we do, or stumble, which we might, there is always the remedy of repentance and forgiveness.

We are to teach our children the moral standard to avoid every kind of immorality. The precious powers within their mortal bodies “are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.”² We must be completely faithful in marriage.

We are to keep the law of tithing. We attend to our responsibilities in the Church. We gather each week for sacrament meeting to renew the covenants and earn the promises in those simple and sacred prayers over the bread and water. We are to honor the priesthood and be obedient to the covenants and ordinances.

Stakes of Zion

Those Brethren on Ensign Peak knew that they were to live ordinary lives and keep the image of Christ engraven in their countenances (see Alma 5:14).

They understood that the stakes were to be a defense and a refuge, but at that time there was not one stake on the earth. They knew their mission was to establish stakes of Zion in every nation of the earth.

Perhaps they wondered what kind of wrath or storm could be poured out that they had not already experienced. They had endured savage opposition, violence, terrorism. Their homes had been burned, their property taken. They were driven from their homes time after time after time. They knew then, as we know now, that there would be no end to opposition. The nature of it changes, but it never ends. There would be no end to the kinds of challenges that the early Saints would face. New challenges would be different than, but certainly not less than, that through which they had made their way.

Now the stakes of Zion number in the thousands and are all over the world. The members number in the millions and growing. Neither of these can be held back, for this is the work of the Lord. Now members live in 160 nations and speak over 200 languages.

Some live with an unspoken fear of what awaits us and the Church in the world. It grows ever darker in morality and spirituality. If we will gather into the Church, live the simple principles of the gospel, live moral lives, keep the Word of

Wisdom, tend to our priesthood and other duties, then we need not live in fear. The Word of Wisdom is a key to both physical health and revelation. Avoid tea, coffee, liquor, tobacco, and narcotics.

We can live where we wish, doing the best we can to make a living, whether modest or generous. We are free to do as we wish with our lives, assured of the approval and even the intervention of the Almighty, confident of constant spiritual guidance.

Each stake is a defense and a refuge and a standard. A stake is self-contained with all that is needed for the salvation and exaltation of those who would come within its influence, and temples are ever closer.

No end to opposition

There has been no end to opposition. There are misinterpretations and misrepresentations of us and of our history, some of it mean-spirited and certainly contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and His gospel. Sometimes clergy, even ministerial organizations, oppose us. They do what we would never do. We do not attack or criticize or oppose others as they do us.

Even today there are those preposterous stories handed down and repeated so many times they are believed. One of the silliest of them is that Mormons have horns.

Years ago, I was at a symposium at a college in Oregon. Present were a Catholic bishop, a rabbi, an Episcopalian minister, an Evangelical minister, a Unitarian clergyman, and myself.

The president of the school, Dr. Bennett, hosted a breakfast. One of them asked which wife I had brought. I told them I had a choice of one. For a second, I thought that I was being singled out for embarrassment. Then someone asked the Catholic bishop if he had brought his wife.

The next question came from Dr. Bennett to me: "Is it true that Mormons have horns?"

I smiled and said, "I comb my hair so that they can't be seen."

Dr. Bennett, who was completely bald, put both hands on the top of his head and said, "Oh! You can never make a Mormon out of me!"

Strangest of all, otherwise intelligent people claim we are not Christian. This shows that they know little or nothing about us. It is a true principle that you cannot lift yourself by putting others down.

The Church is our defense and refuge

Some suppose that our high standards will repel growth. It is just the opposite. High standards are a magnet. We are all children of God, drawn to the truth and to good.

We face the challenge of raising families in the world in darkening clouds of wickedness. Some of our members are unsettled, and sometimes they wonder: Is there any place one can go to escape from it all? Is there another town or a state or a country where it is safe, where one can find refuge? The answer generally is no. The defense and the refuge is where our members now live.

The Book of Mormon prophesies, "Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among all nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance" (3 Nephi 21:28).

Those who come out of the world into the Church, keep the commandments, honor the priesthood, and enter into activity have found the refuge.

We are not to be afraid

A few weeks ago in one of our meetings, Elder Robert C. Oaks, one of the seven Presidents of the Seventy (a retired

four-star general and commander of NATO air forces in Central Europe), reminded us of an accord signed by 10 nations on board the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, which ended World War II. Some of us were in Asia at the time. Said Elder (General) Oaks: "I can't even imagine a circumstance today in which such a meeting could be held or such an accord could be signed to end the war against terrorism and wickedness in which we are engaged. It is not that kind of war."

We are not to be afraid, even in a world where the hostilities will never end. The war of opposition that was prophesied in the revelations continues today. We are to be happy and positive. We are not to be afraid. Fear is the opposite of faith.

Each of us is to be a standard

We know that activity in the Church centers in the family. Wherever members are in the world, they should establish a family where children are welcome and treasured as "an heritage of the Lord" (Psalm 127:3). A worthy Latter-day Saint family is a standard to the world.

Not only are we to maintain the highest of standards, but each of us is to *be* a standard, a defense, a refuge. We are to "let [our] light so shine before men, that they may see [our] good works, and glorify [our] Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16; see also 3 Nephi 12:16).

All the struggles and exertions of past generations have brought to us in our day the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the authority to administer, and the where-withal to accomplish the ministry. It all comes together in this dispensation of the fulness of times, in the which the consummation of all things will be completed and the earth prepared for the coming of the Lord.

We are as much a part of this work as were those men who untied that yellow

bandana from Willard Richards's walking stick and descended from Ensign Peak. That bandana, waved aloft, signaled the great gathering which had been prophesied in ancient and modern scriptures.

We speak of the Church as our refuge, our defense. There is safety and protection in the Church. It centers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Latter-day Saints learn to look within themselves to see the redeeming power of the Savior of all mankind. The principles of the gospel taught in the Church and learned from the scriptures become a guide for each of us individually and for our families.

We know that the homes we establish, and those of our descendants, will be the refuge spoken of in the revelations—the “light,” the “standard,” the “ensign” for all nations, and the “refuge” against the gathering storms (see D&C 115:5–6; Isaiah 11:12; 2 Nephi 21:12).

Jesus Christ is our ensign

The ensign to which all of us are to rally is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father, whose Church this is and whose name we bear and whose authority we carry.

We look forward with faith. We have seen many events in our lifetime, and many will yet occur that will tax our courage and extend our faith. We are to “rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great [will be our] reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12).

Willingly defend the history of the Church, and do “not [be] ashamed of the gospel of [Jesus] Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16).

We will face the challenges, for we cannot avoid them, and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach of Him as our Savior and our Refuge, our Redeemer.

If a well-worn yellow bandana was good enough to be an ensign to the world, then ordinary men who hold the priesthood and ordinary women and ordinary children in ordinary families, living the gospel as best they can all over the world, can shine forth as a standard, a defense, a refuge against whatever is to be poured out upon the earth.

“We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

This Church will prosper. It will prevail. Of this I am absolutely certain. I bear this testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Journal of Wilford Woodruff, July 26, 1847, Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; see also B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 3:270–71.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.

Elder David A. Bednar

This afternoon I pray that the Holy Ghost will assist me and you as we review together important gospel principles.

Visits to less-active members

One of my favorite activities as a priesthood leader is visiting members of

the Church in their homes. I especially enjoy calling upon and talking with members who commonly are described as “less active.”

During the years I served as a stake president, I often would contact one of the bishops and invite him to prayerfully identify individuals or families we could

visit together. Before traveling to a home, the bishop and I would kneel and petition our Heavenly Father for guidance and inspiration, for us and for the members with whom we would meet.

Our visits were quite straightforward. We expressed love and appreciation for the opportunity to be in their home. We affirmed that we were servants of the Lord on His errand to their home. We indicated that we missed and needed them—and that they needed the blessings of the restored gospel. And at some point early in our conversation I often would ask a question like this: “Will you please help us understand why you are not actively participating in the blessings and programs of the Church?”

“I was offended by . . .”

I made hundreds and hundreds of such visits. Each individual, each family, each home, and each answer was different. Over the years, however, I detected a common theme in many of the answers to my questions. Frequently responses like these were given:

“Several years ago a man said something in Sunday School that offended me, and I have not been back since.”

“No one in this branch greeted or reached out to me. I felt like an outsider. I was hurt by the unfriendliness of this branch.”

“I did not agree with the counsel the bishop gave me. I will not step foot in that building again as long as he is serving in that position.”

Many other causes of offense were cited—from doctrinal differences among adults to taunting, teasing, and excluding by youth. But the recurring theme was, “I was offended by . . .”

The bishop and I would listen intently and sincerely. One of us might next ask about their conversion to and testimony of the restored gospel. As we talked, eyes often were moist with tears as these good

people recalled the confirming witness of the Holy Ghost and described their prior spiritual experiences. Most of the “less-active” people I have ever visited had a discernible and tender testimony of the truthfulness of the restored gospel. However, they were not presently participating in Church activities and meetings.

And then I would say something like this: “Let me make sure I understand what has happened to you. Because someone at church offended you, you have not been blessed by the ordinance of the sacrament. You have withdrawn yourself from the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. Because someone at church offended you, you have cut yourself off from priesthood ordinances and the holy temple. You have discontinued your opportunity to serve others and to learn and grow. And you are leaving barriers that will impede the spiritual progress of your children, your children’s children, and the generations that will follow.” Many times people would think for a moment and then respond, “I have never thought about it that way.”

The bishop and I would then extend an invitation: “Dear friend, we are here today to counsel you that the time to stop being offended is now. Not only do we need you, but you need the blessings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Please come back—now.”

Choose not to be offended

When we believe or say that we have been offended, we usually mean we feel insulted, mistreated, snubbed, or disrespected. And certainly clumsy, embarrassing, unprincipled, and mean-spirited things do occur in our interactions with other people that would allow us to take offense. However, it ultimately is impossible for another person to offend you or to offend me. Indeed, believing that another person offended us is fundamentally false. To be offended is a *choice* we make; it is

not a *condition* inflicted or imposed upon us by someone or something else.

In the grand division of all of God's creations, there are things to act and things to be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:13–14). As sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, we have been blessed with the gift of moral agency, the capacity for independent action and choice. Endowed with agency, you and I are agents, and we primarily are to act and not just be acted upon. To believe that someone or something can *make* us feel offended, angry, hurt, or bitter diminishes our moral agency and transforms us into objects to be acted upon. As agents, however, you and I have the power to act and to choose how we will respond to an offensive or hurtful situation.

Thomas B. Marsh, the first President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in this dispensation, elected to take offense over an issue as inconsequential as milk strippings (see *Deseret News*, Apr. 16, 1856, 44). Brigham Young, on the other hand, was severely and publicly rebuked by the Prophet Joseph Smith, but he chose not to take offense (see Truman G. Madsen, "Hugh B. Brown—Youthful Veteran," *New Era*, Apr. 1976, 16).

In many instances, choosing to be offended is a symptom of a much deeper and more serious spiritual malady. Thomas B. Marsh allowed himself to be acted upon, and the eventual results were apostasy and misery. Brigham Young was an agent who exercised his agency and acted in accordance with correct principles, and he became a mighty instrument in the hands of the Lord.

The Savior is the greatest example of how we should respond to potentially offensive events or situations.

"And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and

he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men" (1 Nephi 19:9).

Through the strengthening power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, you and I can be blessed to avoid and triumph over offense. "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165).

A latter-day learning laboratory

The capacity to conquer offense may seem beyond our reach. This capability, however, is not reserved for or restricted to prominent leaders in the Church like Brigham Young. The very nature of the Redeemer's Atonement and the purpose of the restored Church are intended to help us receive precisely this kind of spiritual strength.

Paul taught the Saints in Ephesus that the Savior established His Church "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12–13).

Please note the use of the active word *perfecting*. As described by Elder Neal A. Maxwell, the Church is not "a well-provisioned rest home for the already perfected" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1982, 57; or *Ensign*, May 1982, 38). Rather, the Church is a learning laboratory and a workshop in which we gain experience as we practice on each other in the ongoing process of "perfecting the Saints."

Elder Maxwell also insightfully explained that in this latter-day learning laboratory known as the restored Church, the members constitute the "clinical material" (see "Jesus, the Perfect Mentor," *Ensign*, Feb. 2001, 13) that is essential for growth and development. A visiting teacher learns her duty as she serves and loves her Relief

Society sisters. An inexperienced teacher learns valuable lessons as he teaches both supportive and inattentive learners and thereby becomes a more effective teacher. And a new bishop learns how to be a bishop through inspiration and by working with ward members who wholeheartedly sustain him, even while recognizing his human frailties.

Understanding that the Church is a learning laboratory helps us to prepare for an inevitable reality. In some way and at some time, someone in this Church will do or say something that could be considered offensive. Such an event will surely happen to each and every one of us—and it certainly will occur more than once. Though people may not intend to injure or offend us, they nonetheless can be inconsiderate and tactless.

You and I cannot control the intentions or behavior of other people. However, we do determine how we will act. Please remember that you and I are agents endowed with moral agency, and we can choose not to be offended.

During a perilous period of war, an exchange of letters occurred between Moroni, the captain of the Nephite armies, and Pahoran, the chief judge and governor of the land. Moroni, whose army was suffering because of inadequate support from the government, wrote to Pahoran “by the way of condemnation” (Alma 60:2) and harshly accused him of thoughtlessness, slothfulness, and neglect. Pahoran might easily have resented Moroni and his message, but he chose not to take offense. Pahoran responded compassionately and described a rebellion against the government about which Moroni was not aware. And then he responded, “Behold, I say unto you, Moroni, that I do not joy in your great afflictions, yea, it grieves my soul. . . . And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart” (Alma 61:2, 9).

One of the greatest indicators of our own spiritual maturity is revealed in how we respond to the weaknesses, the inexperience, and the potentially offensive actions of others. A thing, an event, or an expression may be offensive, but you and I can choose not to be offended—and to say with Pahoran, “It mattereth not.”

Two invitations

I conclude my message with two invitations.

Invitation number one. I invite you to learn about and apply the Savior’s teachings about interactions and episodes that can be construed as offensive.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. . . .

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

“And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43–44, 46–48).

Interestingly, the admonition to “be ye therefore perfect” is immediately preceded by counsel about how we should act in response to wrongdoing and offense. Clearly, the rigorous requirements that lead to the perfecting of the Saints include assignments that test and challenge us. If a person says or does something that we consider offensive, our first obligation is to refuse to take offense and then communicate privately, honestly, and directly with that individual. Such an approach invites inspiration from the Holy Ghost and permits misperceptions to be clarified and true intent to be understood.

Invitation number two. Many of the individuals and families who most need to hear this message about choosing not to be offended are probably not participating with us in conference today. I suspect all of us are acquainted with members who are staying away from church because they have chosen to take offense—and who would be blessed by coming back.

Will you please prayerfully identify a person with whom you will visit and extend the invitation to once again worship with us? Perhaps you could share a copy of this talk with her or him, or you may prefer to discuss the principles we have reviewed today. And please remember that such a request should be conveyed

lovingly and in meekness—and not in a spirit of self-righteous superiority and pride.

As we respond to this invitation with faith in the Savior, I testify and promise that doors will open, our mouths will be filled, the Holy Ghost will bear witness of eternal truth, and the fire of testimony will be rekindled.

As His servant, I echo the words of the Master when He declared, “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended” (John 16:1). I witness the reality and divinity of a living Savior and of His power to help us avoid and overcome offense. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

A. Roger Merrill

Experience as a missionary

One morning when I was serving as a young missionary in Beaumont, Texas, my companion became ill and needed to rest. Following the counsel of our mission president for such situations, I pulled a chair up by the open window in our fourth-story apartment and began to read in the Book of Mormon.

Soon I became immersed in the scriptures, and after a time I came to Alma chapter 29, verses 1 and 2:

“O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!

“Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.”

As I pondered on Alma’s words, they became deeply personal. My companion

and I had knocked on hundreds of doors in Beaumont, offering to share our message, but with limited success. In my mind’s eye, I began to imagine what it might be like if I were an angel and could cry repentance with a voice to shake the earth. I looked out the window at the people coming and going on the street below. I imagined what it would be like if I were standing there shining like an angel, with my hands raised, speaking with a voice of thunder. I envisioned the buildings shaking and people falling to the earth. Under the circumstances I imagined, they might have a sudden desire to listen to what I had to say!

But then I read the next verse: “But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me” (v. 3).

I was humbled to realize the Lord loves all His children and has a plan for His work. My job was to do my part.

I was also humbled to realize something else. In that moment, I *knew* that

what I was reading was not fiction—it was real. Quietly and peacefully while I was reading, I had been filled with light and with the realization that this Alma was an actual person, that he had lived, and that he too had deeply desired to share the gospel message with others.

If you had asked me in that moment, “Do you know this is true?” I would have replied, “Absolutely!” At that point, it became clear to me that I was receiving a spiritual witness of the truth of the Book of Mormon.

Receiving by the Spirit

As I have reflected on that experience—and many such witnesses since—I have come to better understand how vitally important it is to *receive* by the Spirit. We often focus, appropriately, on the importance of teaching by the Spirit. But we need to remember that the Lord has placed equal, if not greater, importance on receiving by the Spirit. (See D&C 50:17–22.)

Such receiving is a foundational gospel pattern. It is set forth in the very ordinance by which we are confirmed members of the Church. In this ordinance we are instructed to “receive the Holy Ghost.” This is a formal invitation to act, to receive this great gift.

As I have become more aware of this principle, I find that the scriptures are replete with the doctrine of receiving. As President Boyd K. Packer has said, “No message appears in scripture more times, in more ways than ‘Ask, and ye shall receive’” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1991, 26; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 21).

At the very core of our mortal probation is the choice to receive Jesus as the Christ. The Apostle John taught:

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (John 1:11–12).

One cannot help but wonder how many gifts and blessings surround us that we do not receive. The Lord has said: “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:33).

In our Church meetings, in our personal and family scripture study, and even this day as we listen to the Lord’s prophets and apostles, some of us will receive more than others. Why? I am learning that those who truly receive do at least three things that others may not do.

Seeking the Spirit

First, they *seek*. We live in an entertainment world, a spectator world. Without realizing it, we can find ourselves coming to conference or going to church with the attitude, “Here I am; now inspire me.” We become spiritually passive.

When we focus instead on seeking and receiving the Spirit, we become less concerned about a teacher or speaker holding our attention and more concerned about giving our attention to the Spirit. Remember, *receive* is a verb. It is a principle of action. It is a fundamental expression of faith.

Feeling the Spirit

Second, those who receive, *feel*. While revelation comes to the mind and heart, it is most often felt. Until we learn to pay attention to these spiritual feelings, we usually do not even recognize the Spirit.

In a recent conversation I had with one of our daughters-in-law, she suggested that we can help even young children become aware of these feelings of the Spirit. We can ask them questions such as “How do you feel as we read this scripture together? What do you feel the Spirit is prompting you to do?” These are good

questions for us all. They demonstrate the desire to receive.

Intending to act

Third, those who receive by the Spirit *intend to act*. As the prophet Moroni instructed, to receive a witness of the Book of Mormon, we must ask “with real intent” (Moroni 10:4). The Spirit teaches when we honestly intend to do something about what we learn.

As I have read back over my journal entry to understand and learn more from the experience I had as a missionary, I have realized that although I had read in the Book of Mormon before, what happened

in Beaumont that morning was different because I was different. As inexperienced as I was, at least on that occasion I was sincerely trying to seek and to feel, and my intent was to act in faith on what I learned. I know now that such witnesses are available to each of us on a regular basis if we will receive them.

The Book of Mormon is the word of God. Jesus is the Christ. The gospel has been restored, and we truly are in the presence of modern apostles and prophets.

I pray that this day and always we will learn to better receive, that we may truly rejoice in both the gift and “in him who is the giver of the gift.”

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Craig A. Cardon

Moving individuals closer to God

Years ago our young family moved into a home on what was then the edge of development in our community, which afforded a view of the mountains to the east. One Monday morning, just as I finished dressing and was ready to rush out the door to work, our six-year-old son, Craig, came bringing his four-year-old brother, Andrew, into the room by the hand. With determination Craig looked up at me and said, “Dad, yesterday in Primary my teacher told us that if you hold the priesthood, you can move mountains. I told Andy this, and he doesn’t believe me. You hold the priesthood, right, Dad?” Then turning his little body and pointing out the window, he looked back at me and said, “See those mountains over there? Show him, Dad!”

What followed was a sweet experience. How grateful I was for young sons who were beginning a lifetime of learning about the priesthood.

While the Lord truly taught those to whom He had given the priesthood that

by faith mountains would move¹—and there are recorded instances of such²—my hope is to bring greater understanding to that aspect of the doctrine of the priesthood which *moves individuals* closer to God, affording them the opportunity to become like Him and live eternally in His presence. This doctrine involves both the sons and the daughters of God. Accordingly, I pray that what I share will be of help to both.

Priesthood authority and ordinances

In 1823 the angel Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith and quoted several scriptures, including the following from Malachi: “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet.”³ This first recorded reference to priesthood in this dispensation anticipated a process that would unfold in the decades to come.

In 1829 John the Baptist restored the Aaronic Priesthood,⁴ followed shortly thereafter by Peter, James, and John restoring the Melchizedek Priesthood.⁵

In 1836 Moses and Elias restored the keys of the gathering of Israel and of the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham,⁶ followed then by Elijah restoring the keys of sealing. The revelation then concludes with Elijah telling the Prophet Joseph, "Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands."⁷

With all priesthood authority, offices, and keys again on earth, in 1841 the Lord emphasized to the Prophet the importance of building temples, where the Lord could make available to His children priesthood ordinances by which His sons and daughters would be prepared to return to His presence.⁸

He declared: "Let this house be built . . . that I may reveal mine ordinances therein unto *my people*;

"For I deign to reveal . . . things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times."⁹

Earlier in Kirtland the Lord had taught the Prophet Joseph about the oath and covenant of the priesthood, explaining the conditions by which promised blessings are realized.¹⁰ In Nauvoo, understanding grew as to the eternal scope and power of the priesthood¹¹ in blessing all His faithful children, whether in this life or the next.¹² While the priesthood is given to worthy sons of God, His daughters are also a part of His people to whom He reveals His priesthood ordinances. And the promised blessing of "all that [the] Father hath"¹³ is available to both men and women who exercise faith in Jesus Christ, receive the ordinances, and endure in faith to the end. "Therefore, in the ordinances [of the Melchizedek Priesthood], the power of godliness is manifested."¹⁴

The crowning temple ordinance is available only to a man *and* a woman when they are sealed together, forming an eternal family unit. It is by virtue of this and all other priesthood ordinances that the families of the earth shall be blessed.¹⁵ This sealing ordinance is so central to the

Lord's purposes that He has promised to the faithful who are not sealed in this life through no fault of their own this blessing in the life to come.¹⁶ No other doctrine in all of religion better confirms God's commensurate love for both His sons *and* His daughters.

Power to change our natures

The priesthood also has the power to change our very natures. As Paul wrote, "All those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God."¹⁷ This likeness is not only in ordination and ordinance but also in the perfecting of individual hearts, something that occurs "in process of time"¹⁸ as we "[yield] to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and [put] off the natural man."¹⁹ When a man is ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood, he enters into an "order"²⁰ by which he may be refined through service to others, especially his own family, and blessed by the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost.²¹

The Lord instructed all of us when He taught that for priesthood bearers, unrighteousness brings an end to heavenly power or influence, while righteousness strengthens them. He identified qualities that "greatly enlarge the soul" as "persuasion, . . . long-suffering, . . . gentleness[,] . . . meekness, . . . love unfeigned[,] . . . kindness, and pure knowledge."²² He then added these instructive words: "Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven."²³

It is significant that after inviting us to have charity toward "all men," the Lord added the phrase "and to the household of faith." Why? Doesn't "all men" include the household of faith? Consider the implications when this added phrase is un-

derstood to mean more specifically “your very own household of faith.” Unfortunately, there are a few within the Church who exhibit greater charity toward non-family members than toward their own spouses and children, siblings and parents. They may show feigned kindness publicly while privately sowing and cultivating seeds of contention, demeaning those who should be closest to them. These things should not be.

The Lord then spoke of thoughts that are garnished—embellished and guarded—by virtue unceasingly. Such thoughts abhor sin.²⁴ They allow our communications to be “Yea, yea; Nay, nay,”²⁵ unencumbered by guile. They see the good and the potential in others, undeterred by the inevitable imperfections in others.

As the dew from heaven

The verse concludes with a beautifully instructive reference to a distilling process. To better understand the application of these principles in the refinement of our personal lives, consider two glasses of water, each with the same outward appearance, placed in a room with high humidity. After a period of time, water begins to condense on one of the glasses because it is at a different temperature, occasioned by prior preparation not obvious initially, while the other glass remains dry and unaffected. Without compulsory means, the humidity is able to “flow unto”²⁶ the one glass, while the other receives nothing. In a similar way, qualities that greatly enlarge the soul; charity toward others, especially our families; and thoughts garnished with virtue adjust our spiritual temperatures to allow the doctrine of the priesthood to distill upon our souls.

So it is that the priesthood, through the workings of the Spirit, moves individuals closer to God through ordination, ordinances, and refinement of individual natures, thus affording God’s children the opportunity to become like Him and live

eternally in His presence—a work more glorious than moving mountains.²⁷

I conclude by joining my prayer with that of Thomas Kelly, in words edited by Parley P. Pratt:

As the dew from heav’n distilling
Gently on the grass descends
And revives it, thus fulfilling
What thy providence intends,
Let thy doctrine, Lord, so gracious,
Thus descending from above,
Blest by thee, prove efficacious
To fulfill thy work of love.²⁸

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Matthew 17:20.
2. See Ether 12:30; Moses 7:13; see also Jacob 4:6; Helaman 10:9.
3. Joseph Smith—History 1:38.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 13.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 18:9; 27:12.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–12.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16.
8. As evidenced by the Prophet Joseph Smith’s instructions in the upper room of his store in Nauvoo, the Lord restored temple ordinances to the earth prior to revealing them or making them available to His people in the Nauvoo Temple, as He continues to do today in all His temples, accompanied by personal revelation and inspiration (see *History of the Church*, 5:1–2).
9. Doctrine and Covenants 124:40–41; italics added; see also vv. 31–32, 34, 39.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–42.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:8–9.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 137:7–9; see also *Preach My Gospel* (2004), 86.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 84:38.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 84:20.
15. See Abraham 2:11.
16. “The prophets have stated clearly that no blessing will be withheld from any of God’s sons or daughters if they love Him, have faith in Him, keep His commandments, and endure faithfully to the end” (M. Russell Ballard, *Counseling*

with Our Councils: Learning to Minister Together in the Church and in the Family [1997], 55). "All who qualify for [temple sealing and eternal family] blessings will, in the Lord's due time, have them here or in the next life" (Richard G. Scott, in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 88; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 69).

17. Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 7:3; see also Moses 1:6.
18. Moses 7:21.
19. Mosiah 3:19.
20. Alma 13:2, 16; Doctrine and Covenants 107:3.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79; 121:46.
22. Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 121:45.
24. See Alma 13:12.
25. Matthew 5:37.

26. Doctrine and Covenants 121:46.

27. See Moses 1:39.

28. "As the Dew from Heaven Distilling," *Hymns*, no. 149.

President Monson

The choir and congregation will now sing "Come, Ye Children of the Lord." Then Elders Don R. Clarke, Keith R. Edwards, and Larry W. Gibbons of the Seventy will address us. Following their remarks, we shall hear from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang
"Come, Ye Children of the Lord."

Elder Don R. Clarke

Help for a blind farmer

My maternal grandfather, Alma Benjamin Larsen, was only 34 years old when he woke up one morning and noticed that he had problems seeing. Shortly thereafter, he lost his sight entirely. Grandfather had served a mission and been a faithful member of the Church. He was a farmer with a wife and three children, and he could not imagine life without sight. Grandfather's wife and small children now had to bear the extra burdens of helping on the farm, and money became tight.

During this time of physical darkness, many people became instruments in God's hands to help my blind grandfather. One experience that had a powerful impact on his family happened in 1919. It was a year of great financial difficulty for all the people in Grandfather's town. Farms were being foreclosed, and businesses were going broke. There was a sizable mortgage on his farm, and Grandfather received a statement saying he would have to pay

\$195 in order to carry the mortgage over for another year. For him, paying this bill was like demanding a pound of flesh. Nearly everyone was in the same condition, and it seemed impossible to obtain that much money. If he had gathered everything that the farm produced—the horses, cows, and machinery—he could not have sold them for \$195. Grandfather asked a neighbor to butcher two or three of his cows, and he sold them and some other products. He had extended credit to his neighbors with the understanding that they would pay at the end of the year, but none of his debtors was able to pay him. The economic situation for his family was bleak.

In his journal, Grandfather recounts: "I shall never forget that cold evening, just before Christmas of 1919. It looked as though we would lose the farm. My daughter, Gladys, laid a slip of paper in my hand and said, 'This came in the mail today.' I took it to her mother and asked her what it was. This is what my wife read to me,

'Dear Brother Larsen, I've had you on my mind all day today. I am wondering if you are in financial trouble. If you are, I have \$200 you may have.' The letter was signed 'Jim Drinkwater.' Jim was a small, crippled man, and he would have been the last man on earth that anyone would have thought had that much money on hand. I went to his house that night and he said, 'Brother Larsen, I received a wireless message from heaven this morning, and I could not get you off my mind all day. I was sure you were in financial trouble.' Brother Drinkwater gave me \$200 and we sent the \$195 to the mortgage company, and with the extra \$5 we bought boots and clothes for the children. Santa Claus did come that year."

My grandfather then goes on to bear his testimony: "The Lord has never let me down. He has touched the hearts of others as He touched the heart of Brother Drinkwater. I bear witness that the only safety and security that I have ever found has come through trying to keep the commandments of the Lord and upholding and sustaining the authorities of this Church."

Becoming instruments in God's hands

I have thought about Jim Drinkwater many times and wondered how he came to be one that the Lord could trust. Jim was a little, crippled man that God trusted to help a blind farmer with a heavy mortgage and three children. I have learned a great deal from my grandfather's experience with Jim Drinkwater. I have learned that a person does not need to have a Church calling, an invitation to help someone, or even good health to become an instrument in God's hands. How then do you and I become instruments in God's hands? The prophets and the scriptures teach us how.

Have love for God's children

First of all, we must have love for God's children. When the lawyer asked

the Savior, "Master, which is the great commandment?" the Savior replied:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:36–39).

Joseph F. Smith said: "Charity, or love, is the greatest principle in existence. If we can lend a helping hand to the oppressed, if we can aid those who are despondent and in sorrow, if we can uplift and ameliorate the condition of mankind, it is our mission to do it, it is an essential part of our religion to do it" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1917, 4). When we feel love for God's children, we are given opportunities to help them in their journey back to His presence.

Be willing to do what is uncomfortable

The missionary experiences of the sons of Mosiah also help us understand how to become instruments in God's hands. "And it came to pass that they journeyed many days in the wilderness" (Alma 17:9). We must be willing to journey. The sons of Mosiah were willing to step outside their surroundings and do that which was uncomfortable. Had Ammon not been willing to journey into a foreign land, inhabited by a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people, he never would have found and helped Lamoni and his father, and many Lamanites may have never learned about Jesus Christ. God has asked us to journey, go on missions, accept callings, invite someone to church, or help someone in need.

Fast and pray

In their pursuit to help their Lamanite brothers, the sons of Mosiah also learned the importance of fasting and prayer: "They fasted much and prayed much that

the Lord would grant unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them, and abide with them, that they might be an instrument in the hands of God to bring, if it were possible, their brethren, the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth" (Alma 17:9). Do we really want to be instruments in God's hands? If so, our desire will permeate our prayers and be the focus of our fasts.

After losing his eyesight, my grandfather fasted and prayed that if he was to remain in darkness, the Lord would give him peace. He states that almost within the hour "my mind was enlightened and the cloud of darkness had lifted from me." He could see again, not with physical eyes, but spiritual eyes. Later, Alma Benjamin Larsen was called to be a patriarch, where he served for 32 years. Like the sons of Mosiah, my grandfather fasted and prayed, and as a result, he was given the opportunity to bless thousands of God's children.

Be receptive to promptings

We, like Jim Drinkwater and my grandfather, also need to be receptive to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, for when we desire to be an instrument in the hands of God, we can receive revelation. The prophet Alma the Younger tells us of revelations that he received: "I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it. . . . Yea, and this is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to re-

pentance; and this is my joy" (Alma 29:9). Alma had received revelation of what to do.

I have a little book that I carry with me, where I record the inspiration and thoughts that I receive from the Spirit. It does not look like much, and it becomes worn out and needs to be replaced from time to time. As thoughts come to my mind, I write them down and then I try to do them. I have found that many times, as I have done something on my list, my action was the answer to someone's prayer. There have also been those times that I didn't do something on my list, and I have found out later that there was someone I could have helped, but I didn't. When we receive promptings regarding God's children, if we write down the thoughts and inspiration we receive and then obey it, God's confidence in us increases and we are given more opportunities to be instruments in His hands.

In the words of President Faust: "You can be powerful instruments in the hands of God to help bring about this great work. . . . You can do something for another person that no one else ever born can do" ("Instruments in the Hands of God," *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 115). God treasures those who help His children. I invite all of us to follow the counsel of the prophets and become instruments in the hands of God and be among His treasures because we have helped His children.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Keith R. Edwards

Approach suffering with focus on Christ

The Choir has sung "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee."¹ In the Book of Mormon, Nephi, speaking messianically, prophesies:

"And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of

naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men."²

The great and exquisite suffering of the Savior was for us, to keep us from hav-

ing to suffer as He suffered.³ However, suffering is a part of life, and few will escape its grasp. Since it is something that each of us has gone through, is going through, or will go through, there is scriptural suggestion that we can learn spiritual lessons if we can approach suffering, sorrow, or grief with a focus on Christ. Anciently Paul wrote that our suffering may give us an opportunity to know the Savior better. Paul wrote to the Romans:

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”⁴

Experience with injured son

Now, lest anyone go looking for hardship and suffering, that is not what is taught. Rather, it is the attitude with which we approach our hardships and trials that allows us to know the Savior better. Experience teaches us that suffering is one of life’s experiences that will come without seeking it. If I may use a personal example:

Some years ago when our first son was about a year old, I was the source of some seemingly unnecessary suffering. We were attending college, and one evening I had been playing with my boy on the floor. I left the room to study, and as I closed the door behind me he apparently reached for me, raising his hand up behind his head, and his finger went into the hinged side of the door. When I closed the door he suffered a rather severe injury to his finger.

We rushed him to the emergency room at the hospital, he was given a local anesthetic, and a doctor came in; he assured us that it could be repaired. Almost paradoxically, at that point the only thing my one-year-old wanted was to be held by his dad. As long as he could see me he resisted any efforts to bind him for the delicate surgery. When I left the room he

calmed down, and the doctor was able to proceed.

During the process I was anxious and would draw close to the open door and look around the corner to see how things were proceeding. Perhaps by some unseen sense, as I would peek noiselessly around the corner, which was located behind him and to the side, his head would come up and he would strain to see if I was there.

On one of those occasions, as I saw him with his arm pinned out from his side—his head arched, searching for his father—the thought came to my mind of another Son, His arms stretched out, nailed to a cross, searching for His Father, and to my mind came the words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”⁵ What was a very traumatic moment in my life suddenly became very sacred.

Examples of those willing to endure

There is throughout the scriptures a line of men and women who always seemed to keep their focus on Christ—people who, no matter what injury or injustice life dealt them, remained faithful and willing to endure. I speak of Abraham, dispossessed of the land of his inheritance and commanded to sacrifice Isaac; of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, imprisoned for honoring virtue and chastity, and left to linger in jail because of a thoughtless servant; of Ruth, widowed young and left destitute, yet constant and loyal to her mother-in-law; of all three Nephis, both Almas, and of course the Prophet Joseph.

Particularly notable to me is Nephi’s endurance. Continually receiving the wrath of his brothers, he was bound for four days on the boat coming to the promised land. He could not move, and on the fourth day, when it appeared that they were about to be swallowed up by the ocean, the brothers, fearing that they might perish, “loosed the bands which were upon [his] wrists, and behold they

had swollen exceedingly; and also [his] ankles were much swollen, and great was the soreness thereof.

“Nevertheless, [he] did look unto [his] God, and [he] did praise him all the day long; and [he] did not murmur.”⁶

Remember, though, that it was Nephi who recorded: “They scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it.”⁷ Nephi understood.

Although the purpose of the suffering is not always apparent at the time, the Prophet Joseph had a singularly spiritual experience as he lingered in Liberty Jail. The Lord comforted him:

“My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

“And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.”⁸

“Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

“The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?”⁹

Appreciation for the Savior’s suffering

As we are called upon to endure suffering, sometimes inflicted upon us intentionally or negligently, we are put in a unique position—if we choose, we may be allowed to have new awareness of the suffering of the Son of God. While Alma tells us that Christ suffered all that any of us will ever have to suffer that He might know how to succor us,¹⁰ the reverse may also be true: that our suffering may allow us insight into the depth and magnitude of His atoning sacrifice.

As I have pondered that event with my own son so many years ago, it has provided new insights and perhaps even deeper understanding of the magnitude and magnificence of the Atonement. I have a deeper appreciation of what a Father was willing to allow His Son to go

through for me and for each of us. I had a new personal insight into the depth and breadth of the Atonement. I could not imagine that I would willingly have let my son suffer even in this small way; and our Father “so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.”¹¹

Although we have never discussed it, my son, too, would have the opportunity to appreciate the passage where the Savior explains, “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.”¹²

Although I would not suggest that anything here can approach the holy Atonement, the scar on my son’s hand is continually before him, and he has the opportunity, if he chooses to take it, to use his scar as a reminder of scars in the palms of the Savior—suffered for our sins. He has the opportunity to understand in his own way the love the Savior has for us in willingly being scarred, bruised, broken, and torn for us.

Although suffering may provide insight, we must be careful not to compare but rather to appreciate. There will always be infinite differences between us and our Savior. His comment to Pilate, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee,”¹³ reminds us again of the willing and voluntary nature of His sacrifice. We can never endure the depth, the exquisite nature, or the magnitude of His suffering, “which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit.”¹⁴ But like Nephi, we can have a greater appreciation for that which He did, and we can feel His Spirit succoring us, and we can know the Savior in a very real sense, “and this is life eternal, that [we] might know” Him.¹⁵

I bear testimony that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that through His suffering and Atonement we can receive a remission of our sins and can gain eternal

life. I bear witness of His gentle and loving kindness. He is the Only Begotten of the Father and in all things did the will of His Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *Hymns*, no. 141.
2. 1 Nephi 19:9.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19.
4. Romans 8:16–17.

5. Matthew 27:46.
6. 1 Nephi 18:15–16.
7. 1 Nephi 19:9.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–8.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7–8.
10. See Alma 7:11–12.
11. John 3:16.
12. Isaiah 49:16.
13. John 19:11.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 19:18.
15. John 17:3.

Elder Larry W. Gibbons

Belief in God as our Creator

As someone trained in medicine, understanding the complexity and the order and the harmony of the human body reinforces my faith in a Creator. I believe in God. I believe He created us.

The alternative to a belief in a Creator is to believe that life arose somehow spontaneously by accident. I do not believe that.

And if God created us, it is not logical that He would then leave us alone. It makes sense He would give us guidance. Some of this guidance has come in the form of what we call commandments.

Commandments are guideposts

Commandments are not given to burden or restrict us. Rather, they are guideposts from an all-wise Heavenly Father to keep us out of trouble, to bring us a fullness of happiness in this life, and to bring us safely back home to Him.

In a talk at Brigham Young University in 1994, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner said:

“I’m a traditional Jew, and I observe the biblical dietary laws. . . . I suspect most of you assume I go around all day saying to myself, ‘Boy, would I love to eat pork chops, but that mean old God won’t let me.’ Not so. The fact . . . is, I go around all

day saying, ‘Isn’t it incredible? There are five billion people on this planet and God cares what I have for lunch [and] what kind of language I use.’

“ . . . I am not diminished by being told there are certain things I may not do because they are wrong. Rather, it enhances me.”¹

Elder Henry B. Eyring said it even better in the first worldwide leadership training broadcast: “The Lord has given us His standards of worthiness. He has not done it to keep us away from Him but to draw us to Him.”²

Brothers and sisters, keeping the commandments makes all the difference in this life and in the next. To be worthy of the celestial kingdom and the joy that is there, we must keep the commandments!

The only standard that makes sense for any of us is a celestial standard. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read, “For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.”³ It’s that simple! But we do not have to wait to experience celestial joy. Living the commandments brings joy here and now.

Leaving the world behind

My fear is that too many of us are not fully committed to living all the commandments. These Saints are not willing

to leave the world completely behind. They are holding back.

In the priesthood leadership session of a regional conference, we sang the hymn “Ye Elders of Israel.” The chorus contains a line “O Babylon, O Babylon, we bid thee farewell.”⁴ Following the singing, Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke and expressed the thought that bidding Babylon farewell is actually one of our challenges, that too many of us like to keep a summer cottage there.⁵

We cannot keep one foot in the Church and one foot in the world. One reason is the world and the Church are rapidly diverging. We will lose our balance.

We know that “no man can serve two masters.”⁶ Some, I fear, are attempting to do what President Marion G. Romney described as trying to “serve the Lord without offending the devil.”⁷

The Savior taught: “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”⁸

How do we lose our savor? One way is when we stop being different from the world. Many in the Church are drifting in the direction of the world and looking and becoming more and more like the world. We must stop drifting.

Elder Robert D. Hales said: “As Latter-day Saints, we need not look like the world. We need not entertain like the world. Our personal habits should be different. Our recreation should be different.”⁹

In this day of moral relativism we must be prepared to take a stand and say, “This is right, and this is wrong.” We cannot follow the crowd! Now, I am not suggesting, of course, that we move to the wilderness and lock our doors. We can be in the world, go to school, go to work, join worthwhile community organizations, and so forth. But we must hold to the Lord’s standards.

Being “altogether” Latter-day Saints

I have a dear friend who is a respected physician. He writes a regular national article on health. Often his subject concerns nutrition. He has a problem. He loves doughnuts—delicious but not usually considered one of the world’s most nutritious foods.

To resolve this dilemma, he has come up with what he calls his 80:20 theory of nutrition. This theory says if you are very good 80 percent of the time, you can eat what you want the other 20 percent of the time.

Now, this may be all right in nutrition, but the 80:20 principle is not acceptable in such things as gambling, pornography, or honesty. Brothers and sisters, are we sometimes 80:20 members of the Church?

Consider the woman who keeps the Sabbath day holy, unless she needs something from the store. Or the man who is honest in all his dealings until he cannot resist the urge to exaggerate his tax deductions because it saves him over \$1,000. Or the father who is kind and gentle with his wife and children except when he has had a difficult day at the office.

Brothers and sisters, let’s sell that summer cottage in Babylon. Let us be not “almost” but “altogether” Latter-day Saints.

In Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 14:28, the Lord says: “Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.” I love that phrase “settle this.” Brothers and sisters, I pray that we are “settled.” There are precious blessings that come only from the complete yielding of one’s heart to God.

Safety in keeping the commandments

President Heber J. Grant said: “There is but one path of safety to the Latter-day Saints, and that is the path of duty. It is not a testimony, it is not marvelous manifestations, it is not knowing that the Gospel of

Jesus Christ is true, . . . it is not actually knowing that the Savior is the Redeemer, and that Joseph Smith was His prophet, that will save you and me, but it is the keeping of the commandments of God, the living the life of a Latter-day Saint.”¹⁰

Now, young men and young women, as you begin to set your priorities in life, remember, the only true security in life is living the commandments. Financial security and public position are hollow without righteousness. I promise you that.

You lived with your Heavenly Father in a premortal life. You were there with Him. Your spirit knows what it is like to live in celestial realms. You can never be truly happy in an uncelestial environment. *You know too much.* That is one of the reasons that for you, wickedness never can be happiness.¹¹ What a great thing it is to decide once and for all early in life what you will do and what you will not do with regards to honesty, modesty, chastity, the Word of Wisdom, and temple marriage.

Brothers and sisters, stay on the straight and narrow path. No, stay in the *middle* of the straight and narrow path. Don't drift; don't wander; don't dabble; be careful.

Remember, do not flirt with evil. Stay out of the devil's territory. Do not give Satan any home-field advantage. Living the commandments will bring you the happi-

ness that too many look for in other places.

As Elder Nelson taught this morning, this *is* the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This *is* His Church. The Restoration *did* occur! There is no reason to hold back.

I know that President Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord's prophet today. I am grateful to stand with him and thank him for his teaching, his leadership, and his wonderful example of strength. I know that God lives and is our Father. I testify that Jesus is the Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. "The Human Soul's Quest for God," *Brigham Young Magazine*, Feb. 1995, 26.
2. "Standards of Worthiness," *First Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 2003, 13.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 88:22.
4. *Hymns*, no. 319.
5. See *The Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, ed. Cory H. Maxwell (1997), 25.
6. Matthew 6:24.
7. "The Price of Peace," *Ensign*, Oct. 1983, 6.
8. Matthew 5:13.
9. "Gifts of the Spirit," *Ensign*, Feb. 2002, 17.
10. "The President Speaks," *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1936, 659.
11. See Alma 41:10.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Carolyn Rasmus's conversion

Not long after our friend Carolyn Rasmus joined the faculty of Brigham Young University, a group of her new teaching colleagues invited her to join them on a Saturday hike in the mountains above Provo. Carolyn was not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but she had felt particularly wel-

come in her new circle of associates. She eagerly joined them for the climb.

As the sun steadily rose, so did the hikers on the mountainside. Then, as the ten o'clock hour approached, the group began to find places to sit down. Carolyn thought, "This is wonderful. How did they know I needed the rest?" and she, too, looked for a comfortable spot to stretch out. But the participants seemed unusu-

ally earnest about this particular break, some pulling out pencils and notebooks while one intently dialed a transistor radio.

What then happened would be a turning point in her life forever. One of her friends said, “Carolyn, we need to explain something. This is the first Saturday in October, and for us that means not only lovely weather and bright fall foliage, but it also means a general conference of the Church. As Latter-day Saints, wherever we are or whatever we are doing, we stop and listen. So we are going to sit here among the oak and the pines, look out over the valley below, and listen to the prophets of God for a couple of hours.”

“A couple of hours!” thought Carolyn. “I didn’t know there were prophets of God still living,” she said, “and I certainly didn’t know there were two hours’ worth!” Little did she know that they were going to stop again at two o’clock that afternoon for another two hours and then invite her to tune in at home for four more the next day.

Well, the rest is history. With the gift of a leather-bound copy of the scriptures from her students, the love of friends and families in the LDS ward she began to attend, and spiritual experiences we want all who make their way into the light of the gospel to have, Carolyn was baptized and confirmed a member of the Church. With her introduction to general conference that day sitting high atop Y Mountain, Sister Rasmus had seen her own personal fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophetic invitation: “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”¹

Importance of general conference

We are coming to the close of another marvelous general conference. We

have been blessed to hear messages from our leaders, including and especially President Gordon B. Hinckley, the man we sustain as God’s oracle on earth, our living prophet, seer, and revelator. As prophets have done in dispensations from Adam down to the present day, President Hinckley has figuratively gathered us in a kind of global equivalent of the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, has loved us and taught us and bestowed upon us his blessing.²

I think it is safe to say that the prayer all the brethren and sisters have had as they have spoken this weekend is that general conference will have been as uplifting—and if needful, as life-changing—for each of us as it was for Sister Rasmus and countless thousands of others who semiannually respond to our LDS hymn, “Come, listen to a prophet’s voice, and hear the word of God.”³

In my own expression of testimony and gratitude for the messages and meaning of general conference, may I suggest three things these twice-yearly gatherings declare to all the world.

A living prophet on the earth

First, they declare eagerly and unequivocally that there is again a living prophet on the earth speaking in the name of the Lord. And how we need such guidance! Our times are turbulent and difficult. We see wars internationally and distress domestically. Neighbors all around us face personal heartaches and family sorrows. Legions know fear and troubles of a hundred kinds. This reminds us that when those mists of darkness enveloped the travelers in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life, it enveloped *all* of the participants—the righteous as well as the unrighteous, the young along with the elderly, the new convert and seasoned member alike. In that allegory all face opposition and travail, and only the rod of iron—the declared word of God—can

bring them safely through. We *all* need that rod. We all need that word. No one is safe without it, for in its absence any can “[fall] away into forbidden paths and [be] lost,” as the record says.⁴ How grateful we are to have heard God’s voice and felt the strength of that iron rod in this conference these past two days.

Not often but over the years some sources have suggested that the Brethren are out of touch in their declarations, that they don’t know the issues, that some of their policies and practices are out-of-date, not relevant to our times.

As the least of those who have been sustained by you to witness the guidance of this Church firsthand, I say with all the fervor of my soul that never in my personal or professional life have I ever associated with any group who are so *in* touch, who know so profoundly the issues facing us, who look so deeply into the old, stay so open to the new, and weigh so carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully everything in between. I testify that the grasp this body of men and women have of moral and societal issues exceeds that of any think tank or brain trust of comparable endeavor of which I know anywhere on the earth. I bear personal witness of how thoroughly good they are, of how hard they work, and how humbly they live. It is no trivial matter for this Church to declare to the world prophecy, seership, and revelation, but we do declare it. It is true light shining in a dark world, and it shines from these proceedings.

Call to action

Secondly, each of these conferences marks a call to action not only in our own lives but also on behalf of others around us, those who are of our own family and faith and those who are not. This morning President Hinckley movingly reminded us that this is the 150th anniversary of those handcart companies that, as general conference was convening in October of 1856

here in the Salt Lake Valley, were staggering through the last freezing miles of Nebraska and were soon to be stranded in the impassable snows of the high country of Wyoming. He quoted to us President Brigham Young’s inspiring general conference message to the Saints, simply “go and bring in those people now on the plains.”⁵

As surely as the rescue of those in need was the general conference theme of October 1856, so too is it the theme of this conference and last conference and the one to come next spring. It may not be blizzards and frozen-earth burials that we face this conference, but the needy are still out there—the poor and the weary, the discouraged and downhearted, those “[falling] away into [the] forbidden paths” we mentioned earlier, and multitudes who are “kept from the truth because they know not where to find it.”⁶ They are all out there with feeble knees, hands that hang down,⁷ and bad weather setting in. They can be rescued only by those who have more and know more and can help more. And don’t worry about asking, “Where are they?” They are everywhere, on our right hand and on our left, in our neighborhoods and in the workplace, in every community and county and nation of this world. Take your team and wagon; load it with your love, your testimony, and a spiritual sack of flour; then drive in any direction. The Lord will lead you to those in need if you will but embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ that has been taught in this conference. Open your heart and your hand to those trapped in the 21st century’s equivalent of Martin’s Cove and Devil’s Gate. In doing so we honor the Master’s repeated plea on behalf of lost sheep and lost coins and lost souls.⁸

Declaration that Jesus is the Christ

Lastly, a general conference of the Church is a declaration to all the world that Jesus is the Christ, that He and His

Father, the God and Father of us all, appeared to the boy prophet Joseph Smith in fulfillment of that ancient promise that the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth would again restore His Church on earth and again “come in like manner as [those Judean Saints had] seen him [ascend] into heaven.”⁹ This conference and every other conference like it is a declaration that He condescended to come to earth in poverty and humility, to face sorrow and rejection, disappointment and death in order that we might be saved from those very fates as our eternity unfolds, that “with his stripes we are healed.”¹⁰ This conference proclaims to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people the loving messianic promise that “his mercy endureth for ever.”¹¹

To all of you who think you are lost or without hope, or who think you have done too much that was too wrong for too long, to every one of you who worry that you are stranded somewhere on the wintry plains of life and have wrecked your handcart in the process, this conference calls out Jehovah’s unrelenting refrain, “[My] hand is stretched out still.”¹² “I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them,” He said, “[and even if they] deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, . . . if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of Hosts.”¹³ His mercy endureth forever, and His hand is stretched out still. His is the pure love of Christ, the charity that never faileth, that compassion which endures even when all other strength disappears.¹⁴

I testify of this reaching, rescuing, merciful Jesus, that this is His redeeming Church based on His redeeming love, and that, as those in the Book of Mormon declared, “there came prophets among the people, who were sent from the Lord [to speak it]. . . . [Yea,] there came prophets in the land again.”¹⁵ I testify that President Gordon B. Hinckley is in every way,

from head to toe, such a prophet, one whose life and voice we cherish and for whom we have prayed so much. He will now conclude this semiannual gathering. For such a blessing—and all these blessings and so many more—I give personal thanks at general conference time, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Isaiah 2:3.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:53–56.
3. “Come, Listen to a Prophet’s Voice,” *Hymns*, no. 21.
4. 1 Nephi 8:28; see also vv. 23–24.
5. *Deseret News*, Oct. 15, 1856, 252; see also LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen, *Handcarts to Zion* (1960), 120–21.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 123:12.
7. See Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
8. See Luke 15.
9. Acts 1:11.
10. Isaiah 53:5.
11. Psalm 136:1.
12. See Isaiah 5:25; 9:17, 21.
13. 2 Nephi 28:32.
14. See Moroni 7:46–47.
15. Ether 7:23; 9:28.

President Monson

It’s almost difficult to declare the conclusion of this session and this conference. But as we do conclude the conference, we express sincere appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir, the choir from the Provo Missionary Training Center, and the Melchizedek Priesthood choir from Brigham City, and their conductors and organists for the beautiful and inspiring music. We also extend thanks to all who participated in these proceedings.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will now be our concluding speaker at this concluding session. Following President Hinckley’s remarks, the choir will sing “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” The benediction will then be offered by Elder Donald L. Staheli of the Seventy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

General conferences a miracle

My beloved brothers and sisters, what a miracle these conferences are. There is nothing to compare with them anywhere in the world. When you think that we gather here in this great conference hall and that what we say is carried all across the world so that people on every continent worship together the living God, it is truly and wonderfully a miracle. All who have spoken have done so very well. We wish there had been time to hear from all of the General Authorities. Unfortunately, that has not been possible. Representatives of the auxiliary organizations have inspired us with their messages.

The prayers have likewise inspired us. The music has been simply superb.

We are so grateful for this tremendous Conference Center, this great hall in which to meet, and for the technology which has permitted our words to be car-

ried over the earth to our people in many lands and climes.

We wish that there were peace in the earth and constantly pray that it may come.

Now, our beloved associates, we leave with you our love and our blessing. May the Spirit of the Lord dwell in your homes. May love govern your family relations.

For this we pray as we bid you good-bye for another six months, in the sacred and holy name of our Redeemer, and leave our love and blessing with you, in His name, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” At the end, the congregation joined the choir in singing a reprise of the first verse.

Elder Donald L. Staheli offered the benediction.

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE MUSIC

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for the Saturday morning, Sunday morning, and Sunday afternoon sessions. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir. John Longhurst, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe were the organists.

A combined choir from the Provo Missionary Training Center provided music for the Saturday afternoon session. Douglas Brenchley directed the choir, and Linda Margetts was the organist.

A Melchizedek Priesthood choir from Brigham City, Utah, provided music for

the priesthood session. N. Geoffrey Anderson directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen was the organist.

Throughout the conference sessions, prelude, postlude, and interlude music and accompaniments on the organ were played by John Longhurst, Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe.

F. Michael Watson

Clerk of the Conference

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